THE EMPTY ḤIJĀZ[1]

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The first published articles of Professor Richard M. Frank (hereafter: RMF) contain several which may surprise those familiar only with his mature work on the *Kalām*. Three broad categories can be discerned: philological excavations of textual cruces or linguistic obscurities in the Biblical and Christian traditions, from Caesarius of Arles to *Deuteronomy* and *Kings*, remarkable for their lexical tenacity so characteristic of RMF's work on the *Kalām*;[2] observations on the cultural and textual history of the early ʿAbbasid Arabic translations of the Bible, in particular the *Jeremias* of Pethion b. Ayyūb al-Sahhār, the subject of his 1956 Ph.D. at the Catholic University of America;[3] excavations in the Graeco-Arabica.[4] There are two articles which stand out, however. One is an article on the Qur'ān, of which more presently. The other, from 1962, is a treatment of the role of social evolution in the theological system of Teilhard de Chardin: *Social Evolution and the Human Species*.[5]

I read this latter article with some curiosity. I knew next to nothing of the work of Teilhard de Chardin. I was also intrigued to see what RMF

[1] This article has been rigorously peer-reviewed by two scholars whom I respect: Philip Kennedy and Garth Fowden. The infirmities of my Jahizian approach to argumentation which persist, persist despite their strictures and advice. I have often viewed the footnotes as an opportunity to explore issues apposite yet essentially tangential to the main points of my argument, especially in the section on the *wishāḥ*.

[2] Items 10, 16 and 19 in the *Bibliography* in this volume.

[3] Items 1, 11, and 15 in the *Bibliography*. See also item 3.

[4] Items 12, 13 and 14 in the *Bibliography*. These articles have excited much comment, especially item 14: see HELMUT GÄTJE, *Studien zur Überlieferung der aristotelischen Psychologie im Islam*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1971, p. 28-44; *An Arabic Translation of Themistius Commentary on Aristoteles* De Anima (*Oriental Studies*, 2), ed. M.C. LYONS, Thetford: Cassirer, 1973, p. ix-xiii; DIMITRI GUTAS, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (*Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 4), Leiden: Brill, 1988, p. 139 (on Ibn Sīnā's *marginalia* to the *De Anima*); *Aristoteles'* De Anima. *Eine verlorene spätantike Paraphrase in arabischer und persischer Überlieferung* (*Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus*, 9), ed. RÜDIGER ARNZEN, Leiden: Brill, 1998, p. 690-707. The materials discussed in *Bibliography* item12 have now been comprehensively surveyed in *A Greek and Arabic Lexicon*, ed. GERHARD ENDRESS and DIMITRI GUTAS, Fascicle 4, Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 428-437.

[5] Item 18 in the Bibliography.

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would make of the subject and I was not in the least disappointed. This piece contains, in so many ways, intimations of those features of the study of the *Kalām* tradition which I find most appealing about RMF's work. Firstly, we must study any thinker's system in its entirety and as an integrity:

> To treat a subject from the whole scheme of his subject — to cut out a piece from the middle of the bolt, as it were — is to distort both the place and the whole, for in removing it from the synthetic context which gives it its significance one takes away from it a great part of that profundity and, indeed, grandeur of scope which belongs to it. In isolation, without the overtones and resonances of the total context the piece becomes hardly different in any significant way from many similar patterns of contemporary thought (*Social Evolution*, p. 310).

Secondly, we must reflect upon the myriad ways in which humans respond, intellectually, emotionally and culturally, to 'the problem of reflective life':

> Each living culture or sociocultural unit (and I would not prejudice the real difficulty of empirically determining clear boundaries within the real order) whether in the past or the present, no matter how simple or complex, represents in a given collectivity of persons *a particular solution to the problem of reflective life*, a realized form of adaptation of the universal potential of reflective consciousness to a given 'environment' (*Social Evolution*, p. 312).

Thirdly, and to leap some thirty-four years to RMF's Presidential Address to the 206th Meeting of the American Oriental Society, 'language is being's house; man is lodged in its domicile':[6]

> Culture viewed as the formal structure of the adaptation of a social collectivity to a given 'environment', far from being 'mere convention' determines the modality of the existence of the members of the collectivity, in that it determines, within certain defined margins, the range and character of possible acts and that terms and framework within which these acts can be reflectively or non-reflectively lived and understood ... Culture furnishes the material and intellectual form through which human consciousness becomes intelligible to itself; the intelligible form in terms of which the infinite and indeterminate potential of human consciousness determines and defines its own existence (*Social Evolution*, p. 314-315).

[6] This is a translation of a dictum of Heidegger: see *Hearing and Saying what was Said*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.4 (1996), p. 611-618 (presidential address, delivered at the 206th meeting of the American Oriental Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 19, 1996), item 50 in the *Bibliography*. For an early instance of interest in Heidegger, see *Social Evolution*, p. 314, note 13.

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It is but a short step from 'culture' thus conceptualised in de Chardin's system to the following insight:

> Without language — without having meanings and thoughts present in articulate expression — we can't *have* sense and non-sense as such, can't make sense or commit nonsense. We can't even have the inexpressible as such, cannot have it in the sense of having it present to mind as something to recognize and reflect on, save as something presents itself in its recalcitrance to articulate presentation (*Hearing and Saying*, p. 613).

RMF has always been honest about the significance of his first encounters with *Kalām* and the perplexities which it presented to him. In responding to this bafflement, he seems to have drawn on several key features of his analysis of the role of social evolution and human-ness within the theology and Christology of Teilhard de Chardin.

And what of his article on the Qur'ān? Philological ease with the Qur'ān in his early articles on the Arabic Bible is ample testimony to a profound acquaintance with Islam's Holy Book on the part of RMF (items 1, 11 and 15 in the *Bibliography*)[7] and it is such profound acquaintance which precipitates one of the most fundamental insights RMF has brought to bear on the *Kalām*, that it must be considered as an intellectually sophisticated but credible response to the Qur'anic event, the fact of a divine revelation in Arabic:

> In the *kalâm* (and the term itself is resonant in the context), the origin of the questioning which is at the root of the science itself is perforce more self-consciously and more explicitly exegetical because of its explicit relationship to a revelation whose linguistic nature is not merely a fact among facts, something given and to be taken for granted, but an overarching fact, the awareness which must influence the view and conception of all facts.[8]

[7] In *Jeremias* (item 15, p. 139), RMF makes one of his many casual, matter-of-fact observations which will prove extremely fecund for future researchers: 'the common vocabulary of religion was pretty well set in so far as Arabic was concerned. It was based first and primarily on the Coran and then on the *ḥadîth* ... further the canons of correct usage (both in matters of vocabulary and syntax) were those of the nomads of the Arabian peninsula, those of the classical Bedouin poetry — the language of the desert. This implies two things if the translation is to remain within the compass of correct Arabic as measured by these norms: first that being a religious work it will have a definite 'Muslim' cast to it (for their religious vocabulary was that of 'the Book') and further that, if one were not to depart from this standard of usage, many typical expressions of the Syriac ... with its background of a settled, chiefly urbanized, agricultural society, would have to be recast'. Thanks largely to the brilliant investigations by Father Sidney Griffith of the implications of such an observation, the 'Qur'anic' quality of much early Christian theological writing in Arabic is a widely acknowledged 'fact'.

[8] *Beings and their Attributes. The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period* (*Studies in Islamic Philosophy and Science*), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978, p. 11 (item 4 in the *Bibliography*).

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The article, *The Literary Unity of* Sûrat al-Munâfiqîn *(63)*, is almost unknown in Qur'anic studies: I can find no reference to it in, for example, the bibliographies compiled by Angelika Neuwirth or S. Parvez Manzoor.[9] Such neglect is entirely unwarranted, for this article is one of the first, to my knowledge, to challenge the critical shibboleth then prevalent in Qur'anic studies in the West that the *sūras* of the Qur'ān were truly composite in a radical way, i.e. that they were essentially 'an inexplicable conjunction of disparate parts' (p. 258), represented so graphically in Richard Bell's translation, a work almost pathological in its dissection and dismemberment of the Holy Book. Of Bell's now completely discredited theories concerning the supposedly haphazard, gauche compilation of the Qur'ān, RMF notes that Bell:

> Carries his 'pieces-of-paper' hypothesis, which he works out in truly fantastic detail, to the point of eliminating all human activity and assuming the virtual impossibility that the composer of the piece in its present form either could or did exercise any conscious, rationally oriented judgment or intention in the work (*Literary Unity*, p. 266-267).

In the analysis of the short *sūra*, RMF's starting point is to note that 'a goodly body of the [Islamic, JEM] tradition' declares this *sūra* 'to have been composed on one occasion' (p. 258), and it is this which he tries to do justice to by exploring its implications. His sensitivity to the *sūra* as an integral unit of meaning is, of course, as we have seen in the case of Teilhard de Chardin, an instance of his approach to the integrity of any intellectual system however grandly conceived, and to this is added a refreshing insistence that 'each case must be examined on its own merits' (*Literary Unity*, p. 263), an insistence which was perhaps destined to gain some notoriety in RMF's radical reassessment of the debt owed by al-Ghazālī to the cosmology of Ibn Sīnā.[10]

Also refreshing are the rejection of 'statistical probability' as a literary hermeneutic ('a common, though often unstated, assumption of a certain "scientific" literary and textual criticism which all too often seems to confuse reality with the objectification of its own analytic

[9] ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH, *Koran*, in: *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie. Band II: Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. HELMUT GÄTJE, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1987, p. 130-135; S. PARVEZ MANZOOR, *Method against Truth. Orientalism and Qur'ānic Studies*, in: *The Qur'ān. Style and Contents* (*The Formation of the Classical Islamic World*, 24), ed. ANDREW RIPPIN, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001, p. 381-397.

[10] See further the comments of THÉRÈSE-ANNE DRUART, *Metaphysics*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. PETER ADAMSON and RICHARD C. TAYLOR, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 327-348 (p. 327).

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process': *Literary Unity*, p. 262); the emphasis placed as much on the interpretive significance of the redactional process whereby the Qur'ān was given its final form as on 'the total consciouness of the prophet', together with the refusal to read the Qur'ān as the Old Testament ('the final redaction is, for the *Koran*, in great part if not virtually entirely, made either by the prophet, or within his immediate presence (though completed very shortly after his death) rather than by a school of disciples, suffering under a not altogether homogeneous prophetic tradition, often long after the death of the original author, as often in OT': *Literary Unity*, p. 266); the remark that composite structures are no less replete with meaning (here understood as 'authorial' intention) as are the parts of which they are composed (*Literary Unity*, p. 266); recognition of the rhetorical structure of Qur'anic utterance (in this case the 'homiletic') and of its unique capacity for stating the totality in the part ('the desire to talk always within the horizon of the total background': *Literary Unity*, p. 265); and avowal of the problems inherent in *situating* any particular *āya*, in view of the Qur'ān's 'consistent and conscious effort, as it were, to strip the events which may have provoked various revelations of their concrete detail and to describe rather the more generalized "situation"' (*Literary Unity*, p. 262), problems which are merely compounded by the tendency of 'much of the "historical exegesis of the *Koran* ... the projection of the data of the book backwards into recollected situations' (*Literary Unity*, p. 263). RMF's solution to the question of literary unity is basically to interpret the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān, in this instance structurally rather than lexically.

In sum, this article deserves to be better known, for it contains a plethora of insights to the nature of Qur'anic discourse as well as numerous anticipations of many recent literary analyses of the Qur'ān, such as those of Michael Sells, Mustansir Mir, Neal Robinson or Angelika Neuwirth.

Sadly, RMF has never published, in extenso, any of his thoughts on the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia: a smattering can be garnered from reading *Literary Unity*. This is not, then, through any lack of acquaintance: in many of the conversations which I have been privileged to have with him, he has been as likely to quote from the poetry of Labīd as from the tragedies of Sophocles or his beloved Rabbie Burns! It is also obvious from the emphasis throughout his life's work on the foundational importance of a proper and full appreciation of the *ʿarabīya* for anyone with ambitions to investigate the *Kalām*, that he includes poetry every bit as much as grammar within his definition of such knowledge.

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When one allies the breadth of his linguistic erudition in Arabic to his intimate knowledge of Ancient Greek, Syriac and Hebrew, each consolidated by a proper philological training, the result is a scholar admirably equipped to deal with the linguistic demands of the Classical Arabic textual heritage, and sufficiently trained and prepared to see beyond the narrow confines of any of the more restricted, modern divisions of disciplinary specialisms.

Sadly, in the modern world, such a training is the exception rather than the norm and this has, I believe, led to an impoverishment of our intellectual vision. One area of the Classical Arabic heritage which has fared rather badly in the course of these developments is *jāhilī* poetry: a significant number of recent publications, aimed at the non-specialist, has given it such short shrift that I have felt impelled to protest. This contribution to a volume of essays in celebration of Professor Frank is both an apology of poetry and a plea for its continued relevance to any respectable study of not only Islamic origins but also the originary interests and notions of Muslim communities throughout the ages.

In the present work, I intend firstly to establish the semantic emptiness of the pre- and early Islamic Ḥijāz, a semiotic evacuation effected by the Qur'anic event, a religious, linguistic, cultural, social and spiritual eruption which led to the almost total obliteration of anything extra-Islamic (though not necessarily anything extra-Qur'anic) — with one major and, I submit, profoundly significant exception: the *qaṣīda* poetry of the *Jāhilīya*, accorded such a paradoxically privileged status in Allāh's definition of the Qur'ān as unlike any other discourse (or, in other words, inclusion through exclusion). The first stage of my argument will consider the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*, amongst the most obdurate and recalcitrantly resistant of all Arabic art forms (with the single exception, perhaps, of the Qur'ān itself); indeed, it is hard to imagine any phenomenon less connected to the (Late Antique) world outside pre-Islamic Arabia than the *qaṣīda*. In the second stage of the argument, I investigate one instance in which the mature Islamic tradition responded to the empty Ḥijāz, by reflecting on the historical memory of the mythologizing of Imru' al-Qays by his poetic biographers. Despite the ʿAbbasid cultural relevance of the myth of Imru' al-Qays and the construction of his biography out of his verse, one facet of the process remains constant: al-Iṣfahānī and the tradition on which he draws read the life of Imru' al-Qays as fully and vibrantly part of the Late Antique world. In the third move of the argument, this act of reading drawn from the mature Islamic tradition will be compared with several readings of the Ḥijāz within

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and/or outwith the Late Antique oecumene taken from the modern, Western tradition. As conclusion to the argument, I aim to show how the *qaṣīda* can, in fact, be (or rather: ought to be) read so as to form part of the Late Antique phenomenon — so much so that those who pretend to study this phenomenon neglect this body of poetry to the scholarly detriment of their historical ambitions. *Qaṣīda* poetry is as fundamental to a fully contextualised understanding of Islamic origins as are vociferously promoted forms of Late Antique monotheism or intonations of Revelation as miracle.

If the notion of early 'Islam' suffers from conceptual vagueness,[11] the Ḥijāz, its topographical birthplace, is so indeterminate and so open to meanings as to be empty of meaning.[12] Our knowledge is entirely dependent upon either textual information provided by the later Islamic tradition or upon some snippets of a non-textual narrative which archaeology is beginning to provide. As a signifier, then, the Ḥijāz is empty.[13]

[11] Rejection of the interpretive liberties allowed by an essentialising and transcendental conception of 'Islam' is a mainstay of the works of Mohammed Arkoun. There is a very able study by CHASE ROBINSON of the enthusiasms for such a notion of Islam shared by Orientalists and Islamists: *Reconstructing Early Islam. Truth and Consequences*, in: *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. HERBERT BERG, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 101-134. This article is also an important contribution to the methodology of the study of pre-modern Muslims, above all in the period of the Revelation. Robinson makes a convincing case for the abandonment of '"Islam" as a term of historical explanation' (p. 134). Unfortunately, the editor of the recently published *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Jusitinian*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, ed. MICHAEL MAAS, was unable (unwilling?) to heed his plea: Chapter 20, by FRED M. DONNER, is entitled *The Background to Islam*, p. 510-533. Fortunately, the contents of the chapter are not quite as dispiriting as the title might lead one to believe.

[12] My use of 'Ḥijāz' is fuzzy; it includes the mountain belt of the Ḥijāz, the Najd, the central plateau, and the Tihāma litoral and plains (the Ḥijāzī or Meccan Tihāma), though strictly speaking this latter is also 'empty': see the articles collected in *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 6 (1995); FRANCINE STONE, *Editorial*, in: *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 6 (1995), p. 212, notes that 'we must come to grips with a credible definition of Tihāma in the pre-Islamic period, both as a socio-economic and as a geographical region'. The Yemenite Tihāma is as 'empty' today as it was for Muslim authors during the classical period: see CHRISTIAN ROBIN, *La Tihāma yéménite avant l'Islam: notes d'histoire et de géographie historique*, in: *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 6 (1995), p. 222-235; A.F.L. BEESTON, *Sabaeans in Tihāma*, in: *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 6 (1995), p. 236-245; R.T.O. WILSON, *Some Notes on the Arabic Historiography of Tihāma in the pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Periods*, in: *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 6 (1995), p. 277- 285; MICHAEL ZWETTLER, *Ma'add in Ancient Arabian Epigraphy*, in: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 90 (2000), p. 253, footnote 55; G. REX SMITH, *Tihāma*, in: *EI2*, X, p. 481-482 (p. 481).

[13] See further JOHN WANSBROUGH, Res Ipsa Loquitur: *History and Mimesis*, in: BERG, *Method and Theory*, p. 3-19 (especially p. 7-9). The issue of the non-Arabic sources is quite another matter, but hardly seem to me to fill an empty Ḥijāz.

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I have purposefully excluded, for the moment, pre-Islamic poetry as a textual source of information and do not wish to embark upon a consideration of the ways in which the Qur'ān miraculously invites, whilst remaining obdurate to, interpretation and chronology. Although I welcome recent developments in the archaeological recovery of the pre-Islamic Ḥijāz as a means of reflecting upon and testing the text-based accounts (and, of course, vice-versa), and am not in a position to pass judgement upon its reliability (or assessments of its reliability) as material evidence in archaeological terms, there are difficulties in its use as evidence (principally those of narrative: Wansbrough's mimeticist position) — even admitting it as evidence does not avoid the epistemological problems of induction, whether it be those posed in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* by David Hume (we require an inductive argument to justify our use of inductive arguments when we reason from particulars to universals) or by Nelson Goodman (inductive arguments can be constructed to prove, for example, that emeralds are grue, i.e. both green and blue, or that children born after a certain date are immortal).[14]

Indeed, archeology does provide us with some hard, non text-based evidence (a coin, or a datable inscription or a building — 'factuality'), but our responses to that evidence are completely contingent upon the interpretative schemes we bring to bear ('meaning').[15] Thus, inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock have provided the evidentiary bases for completely divergent antithetical arguments for the date of the Dome's construction[16] and in several cases the textual tradition has been dragooned as explication of material evidence,[17] while Umayyad poetry is

[14] See ALEXANDER BIRD, *Philosophy of Science*, London: UCL Press, 1998, p. 18-19 and 165-186.

[15] Consider the following sequence of interpretive strategies deployed in the reconstruction of the history of the pre-Islamic coinage of the Ḥadramawt: 'numismatic studies allow us to establish the typological sequence of the ancient Hadramawt coinage ... The sequence and relative chronology of the series is based on typological studies. The absolute chronology of the series could be verified with the help of archaeological studies': ALEXANDER SEDOV, *Hadramawt Coinage, its Sequence and Chronology*, abstract of a paper presented at *The Seminar for Arabian Studies* held at the British Museum on the 22nd of July, 2005.

[16] For the best discussion of these *āyas*, see ESTELLE WHELAN, *Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'ān*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998), p. 1-14.

[17] See L.I. CONRAD, *Historical Evidence and the Archaeology of Early Islam*, in: *Quest for Understanding. Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Malcolm H. Kerr*, ed. S. SEIKALY, R. BAALBAKI, P. DODD, Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1991, p. 263-282 (methodological reflections on problems arising from the use of 'medieval literary sources' by the excavators of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī).

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one of the many hermeneutic devices brilliantly brought to bear on Quṣayr ʿAmra by Garth Fowden.[18] And I am tempted to wonder at how great an influence the traditional 'textual' account has exerted on the intriguing survey of 'settlement patterns in Arabia in the period AD 565-570' conducted by G.R.D. KING, *Settlement in Western and Central Arabia and the Gulf in the Sixth-Eighth Centuries AD*.[19]

It is important to be clear on this point: the material and archaeological evidence for Arabia in the pre-Islamic period which has begun to emerge over the last three to four decades is truly exciting, but I find myself querying the use to which this evidence is occasionally put, or better the claims which are made for the evidence. The fascinating survey of precious metal mining in the Arabian peninsula offered by GENE HECK, *Gold Mining in Arabia and the Rise of the Islamic State*,[20] does not prove the veracity of the pre-modern Muslim sources which attest to an astonishing abundance of gold among the Meccans at the advent of Islam but rather indicates the plausibility of these materials (although as far as I can see, he musters only one gold mine which reveals traces of activity contemporary with the Prophet Muḥammad: Jabal Makhiyaṭ, circa 626 AD, p. 381), provides a welcome check on exclusive reliance on the silences of the non-Arabic textual sources, and should be a reminder of how little we really know and are likely to know.[21]

And it is the very elusiveness of the Ḥijāz as an empty signifier (afforced with the verificationism of Orientalism) which can, for example, enable Wael Hallaq to attack as 'Orientalist' the agreement expressed by some western scholars with the Islamic response to the

[18] GARTH FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra. Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. A careful balance of material and textual (including epigraphical) evidence is conspicuous in the excellent survey of ROBERT G. HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, New York - London: Routledge, 2001.

[19] In: *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, II: Land Use and Settlement Patterns*, ed. G.R.D. KING and A. CAMERON, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994, p. 181-212.

[20] In: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42 (1999), p. 364-395. See further his *'Arabia without Spices': An Alternate Hypothesis*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (2003), p. 547-576, which aims to synthesize 'source documentation with extant physical evidence' (p. 550).

[21] Note the remark of CRONE, *Meccan Trade*, p. 89, that in the context of Persian silver mining in the Najd, 'Quraysh would seem to have been credited with commercial activities that were in fact performed by others'. See also the timely assessment of the *status quaestionis* by JEREMY JOHNS, *Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46 (2003), p. 411-436; ROBERT SCHICK, *Archaeology and the Qur'ān*, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (hereafter: *EQ*), I, p. 148-157.

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Qur'anic vision of the heartlands of pre-Islamic Arabia as a wasteland devoid of any form of civilization (i.e. as the *jāhilīya*) while, in the process, promoting a most laudable and refreshing, but essentially (at least in traditional terms) un-Islamic, account of the peninsula.[22]

The very emptiness of the Ḥijāz as a signifier invites, indeed demands, a context: for, in the catchy formulation of Chase Robinson

> One may take the Ḥijāz out of the desert and put it into the mainstream of late antique ideas, or one may take the engineers of earliest Islam ... out of Arabia and put them in second/eighth- or third/ninth-century Iraq or Syria.[23]

There are a number of perspectives from which we can reflect upon the semantic indeterminacy of the Ḥijāz. I propose to think about the representative inhabitants of the area and the peninsula as a whole, the Bedouin, to review the biography of that most famous *jāhilī* poet, Imru' al-Qays of Kinda, to reflect upon Sasanid and Byzantine involvement in the area, and to investigate the wearing of the body-girdle among elite damsels depicted in pre-Islamic poetry.

The seductiveness of the Bedouin

There is a growing number of high schools in England which study 'Islamic Civilisations' as part of the History Curriculum. The Head of History at one school informed me that they had replaced study of the Roman Empire with Islamic Civilisations, in order to prepare the pupils for the study of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict later in their school career. One of the course books widely available is a Schools History Project publication, *Contrasts and Connections* (1991), part of the Year 7 curriculum, Discovering the Past.[24]

Pages 156-159 ('Arabia before Islam') focus on what is most immediately striking and significant about the geography of the Arabian peninsula: it is largely made up of a combination of sandy and stony deserts, and there are very few stretches of land where crops can be grown (detailed on a map, p. 158). Pages 156-157 stress the harshness of

[22] Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 4 and p. 8-28 (respectively).

[23] Robinson, *Reconstructing Early Islam*, p. 132.

[24] Colin Shephard, Mike Corbishley, Alan Large and Richard Tames, *Contrasts and Connections*, London: John Murray, 1991.

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the environment, its hostility to man and the survival problems of the inhabitants of the desert, the nomads — consider Question 5, for example: 'Why do you think Arabs felt they were living at the mercy of nature?' The general impression given on pp. 158-159 is that Arabia was 'backward and less united', as a result of the nomadism demanded by the physical conditions. Similar assumptions dominate the recent book of MOHAMMED A. BAMYEH, *The Social Origins of Islam. Mind, Economy, Discourse*,[25] as they do the profoundly influential and much respected work of MARSHALL G.S. HODGSON, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization. Volume 1: the Classical Age of Islam*.[26]

For Hodgson, even Mecca embodies the Bedouin spirit of independence, almost untouched by the surrounding 'agrarianate high cultures': 'Bedouin Arabia, never incorporated ... into the great agrarian empires that had risen and fallen north of it for so long, was still a pocket of paganism'. In northern and central Arabia, 'such elements of high culture as were found there were merely bits of luster borrowed from the civilization of *Arabia Felix*, or from one of its rivals to the north'.[27]

An empty region is filled with empty people: 'in the pagan view the self was without a center, society without wholeness, and the universe barren of overall meaning'.[28] And what can be maintained of the people can be maintained of their belief systems: the Quraysh had forged an 'independent religious system, ... based on Bedouin ways, and ... neutral to all the confessional religious alliances'.[29] A developed version of this paradigm is BAMYEH's extraction of 'the ideology of the horizons' from what he terms the nomadic ode: 'such an ideology sees in the spectacle of the horizon not so much an inviting mirage as the most fundamental picture of the emptiness of grandiose human quests'; 'the emergence of sedentary societies did not necessarily entail the oblivion of the

[25] Minneapolis - London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

[26] Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974.

[27] FRED M. DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 15.

[28] IRA M. LAPIDUS, *The Arab Conquests and the Formation of Islamic Society*, in: *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, ed. G.H.A. JUYNBOLL, Carbondale - Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982, p. 49-72 and 212-214. Just how far this emptiness could determine how pre-Islamic Arabia was interpreted is well brought out by Jeremy John's excellent discussion of Creswell's and Caetani's theories concerning the 'house of the Prophet' in Medina: JEREMY JOHNS, *The 'House of the Prophet' and the Concept of the Mosque*, in: *Bayt al-Maqdis. Jerusalem and Early Islam*, ed. JEREMY JOHNS, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 59-112 (p. 72-79).

[29] HODGSON, *The Venture of Islam*, p. 157.

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horizons of wandering'.[30] And empty people must have political systems which, if not quite empty, are at least impervious to change.[31]

The most extreme response to the emptiness of the Ḥijāz as signifier is that of Nevo and Koren for whom the Ḥijāz is literally empty: 'there are very few signs indicating that the Ḥijāz was much inhabited in the fifth to seventh centuries AD and certainly not by people using any form of Classical Arabic'; 'the Ḥijāz ... was a relatively empty area'. Their solution is to fill it with their interpretations of archaeological findings in the Negev, i.e. to read the Ḥijāz in terms of the Negev and Mecca in terms of Sde Boqer![32]

Nevo's epigraphic studies, which 'demand to be taken seriously',[33] display similarly deficient interpretative strategies as his archaeological work: in *Towards a Prehistory of Islam*,[34] in order to endow these epigraphical remains with meaning, he applies to them a version of the Wansbrough paradigm, by which he intends that the Muslim sources represent the culmination of the stages and processes whereby scriptural canonization was achieved and are thus the teleology of the tradition. In the end, what Nevo actually establishes is not the expression of a chronological sequence of beliefs from pre-Muḥammadan through Muḥammadan to Muslim but simply the hermeneutic viability of the paradigm he has adopted as his means of giving meaning to silent artifacts — this is most conspicuous when his classifications cannot accommodate as Qur'anic such phrases as *rabb al-ʿālamīna* and *al-nār*, by a process whereby for

[30] *The Social Origins*, p. 3-16 (quotations from p. 4 and 11).

[31] PATRICIA CRONE, *Slaves on Horses. The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 24: 'and where the Central Asian tribes had a profuse and eclectic vocabulary of political titulature, the Arabs made good with *shaykh*, *sayyid*, and a few other terms'. ELLA LANDAU-TASSERON, *Alliances among the Arabs*, in: *al-Qanṭara* 26 (2005), p. 141-173, notes that 'the Arabic terms found in the sources, such as *qabīla*, *ʿashīra*, *ḥayy* etc. are inadequate because they have no fixed meanings' (p. 142, note 1). Yet as her study shows (and as studies of the fluidity and flexibility of Arabian genealogies demonstrate), this is an inappropriate form of 'nominalism': such laconic vocabulary is no indication that the society and social permutations it is intended to cover will be similarly sparse. Quite the contrary: it seems to me that the fluid and dynamic structure of tribal society ensures its elasticity (and hence its longevity) through the looseness of such concepts and the mutability of arrangements which the vocabulary can be made to cover.

[32] YEHUDA D. NEVO and JUDITH KOREN, *The Origins of the Muslim Descriptions of the Jāhilī Meccan Sanctuary*, in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49 (1990), p. 23-44 (quotations taken from p. 24 and 43). For devastating criticism of the interpretative shortcomings of their archaeological finds, see JOHNS, *Archaeology and the History of Early Islam*, p. 411-414.

[33] JOHNS, *Archaeology and the History of Early Islam*, p. 412.

[34] In: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), p. 108-141.

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something to qualify as Qur'anic it must be an exact *quotation* rather than an *allusion* or *echo*, i.e. the ways in which religious texts tend to infiltrate the popular consciousness and leave their imprint on languages. In other words, what does a phrase have to be to be counted as Qur'anic, in this scheme? Can we expect the same level of exactitude of a non-elite artifact as we do of an elite one? And how do we respond to such a disregard for (philological) exactitude in an elite artifact such as a poem? At a time when Muslims seem to have prioritized, in Qur'ān, Ḥadīth and poetry, *al-riwāya bi-l-maʿnā* (paraphrastic transmission) over *al-riwāya bi-l-lafẓ* (verbatim transmission), is exactitude the proper criterion by which to evaluate the material? And, to take two examples, how would we judge the Christian Arabic polemical text of the Second-Eighth Century, in defence of the Trinity, or the apologetic treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis (d. ca. 256/870), which bear the heavy imprint of Qur'anic language, partly by virtue of the Holy Book's domination of the *ʿarabīya* as a vehicle of expression, partly intentionally, in order to allow Christians greater facility in their debates with Muslims?[35]

[35] For examples of the varieties of Qur'anic quotation, allusion and echo in elite (prose and poetic) texts, see J.N. MATTOCK and J.E. MONTGOMERY, *The Metaphysical 'Umar?*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20 (1989), p. 12-19; J.E. MONTGOMERY et al., *Revelry and Remorse: A Poem by Abū Nuwās*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25 (1994), p. 116-14; J.E. MONTGOMERY, *For the Love of a Christian Boy: A Song by Abū Nuwās*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature* 27 (1996), p. 115-124; J.E. MONTGOMERY, *The Vagaries of the* Qaṣīdah. *The Tradition and Practice of Early Islamic Poetry*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1991, Chapter Six; WADAD AL-KADI, *The Impact of the Qur'ān on the Epistolography of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd*, in: *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G.R. HAWTING and ABDUL-KADER SHAREEF, London; Routledge, 1993; p. 285-313; on methods of transmission, see GREGOR SCHOELER, *Écrire et transmettre dans les débuts de l'islam*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002; GREGOR SCHOELER, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, trans. UWE VAGELPOHL, ed. J.E. MONTGOMERY, London - New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2006; on their consequences for our reconstructions of the textual heritage: J.E. MONTGOMERY, *Editor's Introduction*, in: SCHOELER, *The Oral and the Written*; on the use of the Qur'ān in a very early Christian Arabic theological text, see: SAMIR KHALIL SAMIR, *The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity*, in: *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, ed. SAMIR KHALIL SAMIR and JØRGEN S. NIELSEN, Leiden: Brill, 1994, p. 57-114 ('the author is impregnated with the Qur'ānic culture', p. 109); see also, for example, SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH, *The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis*, Article III in his: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic. Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, Aldershot: AshgateVariorum, 2002. Informed analysis of the apologetic, polemical and systematic adaptations and appropriations by ʿAbbasid Christian *mutakallimūn* of Islamic theology (*Kalām*), the *ʿarabīya*, and the Qur'ān, form the bedrock of Griffith's wonderful articles. The general background is covered in: SIDNEY H. GRIFFITH, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1992. What I think we do have to take seriously in Nevo's epigraphical work is the evidence of Judaeo-Christianity and its expressions which he has brought to light. *How* we respond to this phenomenon is, once again, another matter entirely.

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Yet there are some signs in the School's History Project textbook that Arabia was not a hermetically sealed geographical entity: the Map includes Damascus and an arrow pointing 'to Syria and the Byzantine Empire', suggests arrivals from India, and Source 5 is 'written by a Greek sailor in the first century', while we read on p. 158 that 'trade had brought many Jews and Christians to Arabia'.

The point which I wish to make is quite simple: this picture, which is fully consonant with the picture of pre-Islamic Arabia generally accepted among Muslims (it does, after all, highlight the miraculousness of the Qur'ān), is also the picture of pre-Islamic Arabia which one can easily find in much modern scholarship, although the sharpness of its outlines may vary from author to author (as such, it is an inheritance of the philologist founding fathers of the discipline of Islamic Studies who discovered in the *jāhilīya* a highly potent indicator of those features which for them typified the Arab mind). In volume 3 of the series *The Formation of the Classical Islamic World*, for example, entitled *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* and edited by FRANK PETERS,[36] we find in the 'Editor's Introduction', alongside recognition of the substantial movements of sedentarisation (and back again, for the process seems rarely to be stable) which took place in Arabia and acknowledgement that 'there is no lack of material evidence for the Arabs from outside the peninsula' (p. xii), an admission that this 'is evidence from the marches of Arabia' (p. xii), an emphasis on 'the nomadic life' and the consequent lack of unity among 'a nation of tribes', and, most importantly, the implication that the value of studying pre-Islamic Arabia consists largely in the information it can yield on the conditions in which Islam was revealed:

> the tribes of Arabia in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras have attracted the attention not only of historians but of anthropologists and political scientists, who see in them a stage en route or contributing to state formation, a topic of considerable interest in the development of Mecca and the Islamic *umma* (p. xiv).

The seductive appeal of the Bedouin is also evident in the almost schizophrenic presentation of material in Chapter 3 ('Arabia before Islam) of JONATHAN P. BERKEY's otherwise first-rate book, *The Formation of Islam. Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800*.[37] The following statements are telling:

[36] Aldershot: AshgateVariorum, 1993.

[37] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 39-49. There is a similarly 'schizophrenic' presentation of material in MAXIME RODINSON, *Mohammed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985, p. 11-37.

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> A more effective social 'glue' was the blood-feud, which placed realistic constraints on the anarchy of nomadic life and limits on the endemic violence (p. 40);
> The moral order of their society depended less on reference to a framework of supernatural origin than it did to the exigencies of social life in the demanding world of their difficult environment (p. 41);
> It is in fact difficult to say much with confidence regarding pre-Islamic Arabian religion. The situation may not, however, be completely bleak. If we are to understand the rise of Islam, it may be that we can say *something* by looking beyond the particular condition of the Arabs to their place in the wider world of the Near East and of the cultural and religious patterns of late antiquity (p. 42-43).

A similar dichotomy is evident in Daniel Brown's recent book. Brown notes that 'the overall impression one gets from pre-Islamic poetry is that these are people in desperate need of Islam', an impression produced by the ways in which later Muslims recreated their pagan past 'as part of an national Arab conversion story'.[38] These are incantations of the supposed incompatibility of, say, Hellenism (or any other loosely or tightly coherent set of cultural assumptions and expressions) and what Fred Donner has called the 'solid Semitic bedrock', attacked so eloquently and persuasively by Glen Bowersock.[39]

Let us also note finally that pre-eminent in these accounts of the pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula is a shared sense of timelessness, of nomadism as representative of population patterns in the peninsula, of the perduration of this precarious nomadic existence as somehow beyond time and impervious to change, like a Platonic idea or a philosophical universal.[40]

According to Bamyeh, 'we are speaking of a terrain in which life repeats itself both endlessly and precariously',[41] while for J. Spencer Trimingham, the 'Arab humanism' of the nomads is so resistant to change that it allowed them 'to accept the type of Christianity which they met, since religion existed to be exploited by man, not to challenge and change man'.[42] And since the voice of this humanism was poetry, it

[38] DANIEL BROWN, *A New Introduction to Islam*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 15.

[39] DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 94; GLEN BOWERSOCK, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996, p. 71-82 (see especially p. 72).

[40] CRONE, *Slaves on Horses*: 'the history of Arabia ... is one of tribal immutability: there is not much to tell between the Arabia of the Bible and the Arabia of Musil's Rwala' (p. 23); 'the Arabs ... had enormous antiquity' (p. 24); 'the Arabs had lived in freedom from ethnic and social disturbance since very ancient times' (p. 24-25).

[41] *The Social Origins*, p. 3.

[42] *Christianity among the Arabs in pre-Islamic Times*, London - New York and Beirut: Longman and Librairie du Liban, 1979, p. 244.

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too is for Trimingham (like many a student of pre-Islamic poetry before him), incapable of change, alteration and accommodation: 'religion ... was alien to the conventions of Arab poetry ... the profession of Christianity had not affected their mode of life or their poetry, *except on the surface*'.[43]

Yet the mooted representativeness of the nomad is in inverse proportion to the probable percentage of the population of the peninsula that may at any one time have been nomadic, even allowing for returns to nomadism after a period of sedentarisation: 'most Arabians ... are, and have been, settled people'.[44] And attentive readers will note that in several earlier sentences I slip from 'Bedouin' to 'nomadic', but might not demur, for the two are surely identical or at least indistinguishable. There is, however, a world of difference between the terms 'Bedouin' and 'nomad', and the use of the ethnonym Arab (or better: ʿArab) simply makes matters worse.[45] How, then, are we to refer to these representative (if empty) inhabitants of the empty Ḥijāz?

[43] Italics added: *Christianity*, p. 247. 'Arab humanism' is clearly a variant of Montgomery Watt's 'tribal humanism', endorsed as a Marxian hermeneutic so enthusiastically by RODINSON, *Mohammed*, p. 17. See the review of W. MONTGOMERY WATT, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953 by G.H. BOUSQUET, *Une explication marxiste de l'islam par un ecclesiastique episcopalien*, in: *Hesperis* 41 (1954), p. 231-247; and WATT's riposte: *Economic and Social Aspects of the Origin of Islam*, in: *Islamic Quarterly* 1 (1954), p. 90-103. The immiseration of Rodinson's 'Beduin' who 'do not seem to have had much time for religion' and who 'were realists, without a great deal of imagination' (p. 16), 'half-starved and extremely anarchic' (p. 17) are very reminiscent of Marx's proletariat. By far the most imaginative and (in modern terms) theoretically ambitious study of Islamic origins and Mecca as a money-and trade-based society is BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*: see, for example, 'money, trade and abstract thought' (p. 20-33). He is, however, often uncritical and indiscriminate in his use of sources, optimistic in many of his interpretations, and does regularly over-egg his pudding.

[44] DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 11. On Arabian nomadism: FRED M. DONNER, *The Role of Nomads in the Near East of Late Antiquity (400-800 CE)*, in: PETERS, *The Arabs and Arabia*, p. 21-33; HODGSON, *The Venture of Islam*, p. 147-151.

[45] Nomads: A.M. KHAZANOV, *Nomads and the Outside World*, trans. J. CROOKENDEN, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994; E.A. KNAUF, *Nomads*, in: *EQ*, III, p. 543-545; Bedouin: UTE PIETRUSCHKA, *Bedouin*, in: *EQ*, I, p. 215-218; Arabs: TARIF KHALIDI, *Arabs*, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, I, p. 144-145; HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 85-112. To oversimplify, for the sake of clarity: in the two centuries or so before the life of Muḥammad, Arabian nomads are not to be presumed as necessarily identical with the Bedouin, though the latter, as people (rather than inhabitants) of the *bādiya*, could be represented as such, by non-Bedouins — thus a nomad is not necessarily a Bedouin and a Bedouin could, counter-intuitively, be settled for much of the year, and could also share some of the features of lifestyle which characterize the nomad (camel pastoralism, for example); while the ʿArab are those Bedouins who valorised the *ʿarabīya*, immortalised in *qaṣīda* poetry. It is the relationship between the ʿArab and the desert which I try to capture in my neologism, 'bedouinising'.

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Recently, a most spirited and sustained defence of ''Arab' has been mounted by Jan Retsö, who speaks of a 'razzia-loving warrior caste' and imagines the ʿArab to form 'a socio-religious association of warriors, subject to a divinity or ruler as his slaves ... separate from ordinary settled farmers and city-dwellers, living in their own lots often outside the border between the desert and the sown' (p. 587).[46] The notion of a 'socio-religious association of warriors' (but one which celebrates the desert waste, wherever their residence may be) is appealing, but I cannot agree with his contention (p. 587) that the initiation rite described by Herodotus in the Fifth Century BC is that which the poet Labīd is said to have undergone:[47] after all, Herodotus mentions cutting off hair (with no indication of how much hair is removed), whereas Labīd has his head shaved but for a ringlet! In general, Retsö places too much faith in the possibility of the denotational continuity of the ethnonym *ʿarab* and does not really allow for its subsequent appropriation or adaptation as part of a deliberate act of identity manufacture.[48]

Mark Whittow has advocated replacing the term 'Arab' with the term 'Bedu', in accordance with contemporary anthropological and ethnographical practice ('those who see themselves and are seen by others as

[46] *The Arabs in Antiquity. Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads*, London - New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 583 and 587.

[47] He is influenced by the discussion of by S.P. STETKEVYCH, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, Indiana: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 46-51. As Retsö himself notes (p. 606 and 619, note 81) hair-cutting is one of several initiations into the society of adults, originally belonging to the 'rites of puberty, wedding and entrance into adult society'. Thus, Labīd must become an adult before he can engage in the poetic battle. Head-shaving could mark both sacralisation and desacralisation: see G.R. HAWTING, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 68-69 and 143, with further references. Yet JOSEPH HENNINGER, *Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion*, in: PETERS, *The Arabs and Arabia*, p. 119 remarks that 'the offering of human hair was not a true sacrifice but a rite of passage, involving a transition from the profane to the sacred or in the reverse direction'. See also JOSEPH HENNINGER, *Zur Frage des Haaropfers bei den Semiten*, in his *Arabia Sacra. Aufsätze zur Religionsgeschichte Arabiens und seiner Randgebiete* (*Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, 40), Fribourg - Göttingen: Universitätsverlag and Vandenoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, p. 286-306.

[48] See the discussion of the observation that 'ancient observers generally associated the term "Arab" not with a language or culture but with an unsettled way of life' by FERGUS MILLAR, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC - AD 337*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 221-222 and p. 511-515. For an example of ethnonymic slippage from the later tradition (Rūs and Ṣaqāliba), see JAMES E. MONTGOMERY, *Arabic Sources on the Vikings*, in: *The Viking World*, ed. STEFAN BRINK and NEIL PRICE, London - New York: Routledge (in press).

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participating members of Arabic tribal culture'),[49] whereas M.C.A. Macdonald argues (in the context of North Arabia) for greater discrimination in the use of the label 'Bedouin'[50] and Michael Zwettler would establish 'its most restrictive' designation as 'the camel-raising and -riding Arab nomads of the late antique Near East'.[51] Walter Dostal, arguing for an Iranian (Parthian) influence for the saddle-bow and its associated weaponry and cultural complexes (including tent-types, customs and clothing), distinguishes between nomads, 'half-bedouins (breeders of small-cattle)' and 'full bedouins (camel-breeders)'.[52] The masters of *qaṣīda* poetry would represent the development of this last stage in the form of aristocratic 'rider-warriors' (the term is Dostal's: p. 14), adept at warfare with both horse and camel, implicated, to varying extents, in the imperial uses in North and Central Arabia of confederations of rider-warriors as mercenaries and characterized by developed military technology such as body armour and the lance.[53]

We can go further and identify these as the warrior elites of Maʿadd, if we accept the conclusions of the painstaking analysis of the ethnonym

[49] MARK WHITTOW, *Rome and the Jafnids: Writing the History of a 6th-c. Tribal Dynasty*, in: *The Roman and Byzantine Near East. Some Recent Archaeological Research* (*Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series*, 31 [1999]), ed. JOHN H. HUMPHREY, Portsmouth, Rhode Island, 1999, p. 207-224 (p. 219 and footnote 33).

[50] *Was the Nabataean Kingdom a 'Bedouin State'?*, in: *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 107 (1991), p. 102-119 (see p. 102, note 2); I have been unable to consult his *Nomads and the Ḥawrān in the Late Hellenistic and Roman Periods: A Reassessment of the Epigraphic Evidence*, in: *Syria* 70 (1993), p. 303-413 (p. 327 and note 158). See also his *North Arabia in the First Millennium BCE*, in: *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J.M. SASSON, II, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 1355-1369. It is clear, however, that he would not agree with my desire to inflict such a vague tampering as 'Bedouinising' upon such 'an extremely loaded term' as 'Bedouin'.

[51] *Maʿadd*, p. 268, footnote 78.

[52] WALTER DOSTAL, *The Evolution of Bedouin Life*, in: *L'antica società beduina* (*Studi Semitici*, 2), ed. FRANCESCO GABRIELI, Rome: Istituto di Studi Semitici, 1959, p. 11-34 (p.12 and p. 29).

[53] DOSTAL, *The Development of Bedouin Life in Arabia seen from Archaeological Material*, in: *Studies for the History of Arabia, Part 1* (1979), p. 125-144 (p. 129): see also ZWETTLER, *Maʿadd*, p. 280-284, for a judicious assessment of Dostal's theories, Macdonald's critiques and Kuhnen's modifications (stressing the cavalry with the pack-camel as militarily and logistically ancillary); R.M. WEBSTER, *The Bedouin in Southern and South Eastern Arabia. The Evolution of Bedouin Life Reconsidered*, in: *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 22 (1992), p. 121-134. On the elitism of the camel 'nomads', see HODGSON, *The Venture of Islam*, p. 150; FRED M. DONNER, *The Bakr b. Wāʾil Tribes and Politics in Northeastern Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, in: *Studia Islamica* 51 (1980), p. 5-38: 'the great majority of the groups within the B. Shaybān were nomadic or partly nomadic, and it was on this warrior aristocracy of powerful nomadic groups that the Shaybān's claims to leadership or noble status among the Bakr tribes rested' (p. 22).

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Ma'add advanced by Zwettler,[54] and I can see no cogent reasons for rejecting his meticulous and erudite sifting of the evidence, viz. that in the three centuries before Islam:

> the general population of predominantly camel-herding Arab bedouins and bedouin tribal groups — irrespective of lineage or place of origin — who ranged, encamped and resided throughout most of the central and northern peninsula ... and who had come to adopt the *šadād*-saddle and also, by the third century, to utilize it so effectively as a means of developing and exploiting within a desert environment the superior military advantages offered by horses and horse cavalry. Individuals or groups who identified with and comprised that population would have related themselves to it — and to each other — not as kinsmen, confederates or allies, but as colleagues, associates or cohorts in an amorphous, far-ranging, almost idealized aggregation of like-minded compeers and communities who shared many of the same social, cultural and ecological experiences, aspirations, opinions, and values.[55]

By the middle or the end of the seventh century, '*Ma'add* entered the genealogical realm, where it became an eponym for the 'progressive' Northern Arabs'.[56]

In a book published in 1997, I proposed (in pursuance of some of these arguments) that we should in fact make a fundamental distinction between 'Bedouin' and 'nomad', and in the process I tentatively referred to *qaṣīda* poetry as 'bedouinising'. I am now much more convinced than I was then of the need to move beyond reading this poetry as a simple, and uncluttered, index of nomadic/bedouin life, as a miraculously transparent record of nomadic/bedouin existence, and to connect it with the process of the 'bedouinisation' of Arabia which marks the century and a half or so prior to the prophethood of Muḥammad, and which is connected with the centres of political power and cultural influence in the Arabian peninsula:

> The majority of pre-Islamic poetry, especially the most cherished and hence the supposedly most representative (was) ... composed ... in the seventh century by an intellectual[57] (bedouinising) elite connected with centres of

[54] *Ma'add*, p. 223-309.
[55] *Ma'add*, p. 285.
[56] *Ma'add*, p. 285-286.
[57] By 'intellectual', which I admit may be something of an over-statement, giving the impression of arm-chair ideologues, I was trying to convey my deep admiration for the conceptual sweep of this movement's poetic ideology and its ability to manage comfortably abstract notions, such as the irrecoverability of time past and the emotional cancer of fatalism in terms of great immediacy. I cannot accept the materialist reading of *qaṣīda* poetry advocated by BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*, which I find to be too restrictive.

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> political power and cultural influence in the Arabian Peninsula, traditionally conceived, for whom it was expedient to espouse matters nomadic. This poetry may have had its origins in nomadic poetry and may have engaged in the development of nomadic forms, but what we have today is Bedouin and not nomadic, if I can force such a distinction ... an Arabic poetry for Arabs, like an Arabic Qur'ān for Muslims in the religious domain, was an expression of poetic, cultural and political autonomy and pride.[58]

So convincing and satisfying is this picture of the *Badw* created in so much of the *qaṣīda* poetry of the *jāhilīya* that it has continued to cast its spell and enchant for some fourteen centuries.[59]

Looking back I can now see the influence exerted on my ideas by two articles in particular: WERNER CASKEL, *The Bedouinization of Arabia*, and G.E. VON GRUNEBAUM, *The Nature of Arab Unity Before Islam*, a work which contains the best (e.g. the application of the concept of *Kulturnation*) and the worst of his scholarship ('the general tenor of Bedouin life, atomistic, libertarian, devoid of larger purpose, and much in need of that heightening of its petty irrelevancies by which the poets lent it dignity'!).[60] These works consolidated my sense of the emergent political prominence of the Bedouin tribes gained from reading the excellent articles of M.J. KISTER.[61] However, I was unaware when I

[58] MONTGOMERY, *The Vagaries of the* Qaṣīdah, p. 258-259. See further JAN RETSÖ, *The Road to Yarmuk: The Arabs and the Fall of the Roman Power in the Middle East*, in: *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, ed. LEENART RYDÉN and JAN OLAF ROSENQVIST, Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1993, p. 31-41: 'the most famous poets who were also, as a rule, great warriors, were either closely attached to these chiefs or direct descendants of them. The classical Arabic poetry and its language was created in this *milieu*' (p. 39-40). It is in terms of the appeal of the emptiness of the Ḥijāz as a signifier that we must consider the outlandish theory proposed by CHAIM RABIN, *On the Probability of South-Arabian Influence on the Arabic Vocabulary*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), p. 125-134, that the Arabs got their poetry from South Arabia, whose merchants, in their turn, 'could have transported to their own society certain features of Indian poetry' (p. 134).

[59] I would emphasize that this is a generalization and as such a simplification of the multifarious corpora of *jāhilī* poetry extant today, which also contains examples of popular, non-elite verse, as in the Hudhalī *dīwān*, for example, and codifications of the ideologies of Maʿadd, such as the *qaṣīda* poetry of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā. The consolidation of 'bedouinising' *qaṣīda*s led to the emergence of professional panegyrists, such as al-Nābigha al-Dhubyāni and al-Aʿshā Maymūn b. Qays.

[60] In: *American Anthropologist* 56 (1954), p. 36-46; and in: *Arabica* 10 (1963), p. 4-23, respectively. See the arguments against Caskel's theory of re-bedouinisation made by DOSTAL, *The Evolution of Bedouin Life*, p. 23-24.

[61] Articles such as *Al-Ḥīra. Some Notes on its Relations with Arabia*, in: *Arabica* 15 (1968), p. 143-169 (reprinted as Article III in: M.J. KISTER, *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam*, London: Variorum, 1980 and in: PETERS, *The Arabs and Arabia*); *Mecca and Tamīm (Aspects of their Relations)*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965), p. 113-163 (reprinted as Article I in: *Studies in Jāhiliyya*); *Mecca and*

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wrote this book of the suggestion of Patricia Crone that Islam should be understood (in the words of Fred Donner) as 'a "nativist" (consciously Arab) identity movement'.[62]

My account of the consequences of 'foreign penetration characteristic of sixth- and early seventh-century Arabia' is not the engendering of Islam as a 'nativist movement ... as a primitive reaction to alien domination', for as CRONE herself acknowledges, 'the foreign presence is unlikely to have affected the majority of Arabs very deeply'.[63] A most potent reaction to this involvement and the emergence of the courts of Ghassān and Lakhm (like Kinda before them, confederations of elite warrior tribes acting as mercenaries in the employ of the imperial powers)[64] is the emergence of the Bedouin warrior as an expression of a complex of ethnogenetic ideals celebrated in 'Bedouinising' *qaṣīda* poetry.[65] Informed by a *Weltanschauung* of *muruwwa* (manly virtue), at the very heart of which lay a passionate and uncompromising adherence to *ʿirḍ* (honour),[66] set within 'a universal perspective where the paradigm

the Tribes of Arabia. Some Notes on their Relations, in: *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of David Ayalon*, ed. M. SHARON, Jerusalem - Leiden: Brill, 1986, p. 33-57 (reprinted as Article II in his *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1990).

[62] *The Background to Islam*, p. 515.

[63] Islam as nativism: PATRICIA CRONE, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 231-250. Quotations taken from p. 246, p. 247 and p. 249. Consider, however, the arguments of KISTER, in the articles mentioned above, who tends to view intertribal conflict as a direct consequence of Byzantine and Sasanid desire to divide and rule, while for RETSÖ, *The Road to Yarmuk*, 'the Islamic state in Medina can be interpreted in secular terms as an attempt to avoid circumvention of Arabia by excluding foreigners from controlling Yemen and abolishing the system of tribes being hired as mercenaries by outsiders'. In other words, from a non-religious perspective, Islamic Arabia is a declaration of independence, an unforeseen consequence of a long history of foreign interferences.

[64] See the discussion in the next section and generally DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 42-48. Ghassān and Lakhm were to Byzantium and Sasanid Iran what Kinda had been to Ḥimyar. The inability of the imperial powers to control their buffer zones and sometime mercenaries created the state of instability which led to the triumph of the Caliphate of Medina. WHITTOW, *Rome and the Jafnids*, argues that 'great power competition from the third century onwards had led to a phase of political development among the Bedu which transformed the previously unthreatening Bedu pastoralists into groupings capable of forcing the settled powers to take note' (p. 222-223).

[65] See the similar but distinct assessment of HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 229-247 ('Arabhood and Arabisation'); further reflections on the emergence of the Bedouin as cultural norm in: JAMES E. MONTGOMERY, *The Deserted Encampment in Ancient Arabic Poetry: A Nexus of Topical Comparisons*, in: *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40 (1995), p. 283-316.

[66] *Muruwwa*: see JAMES E. MONTGOMERY, *Dichotomy in* Jāhilī *Poetry*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature* 17 (1986), p. 1-20.

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for how one must live and die is founded on the principle of chance',[67] united yet differentiated by their scrupulous investment in the societal dynamics of genealogy, acquired and inherited (*ḥasab wa-nasab*), unanimous in their celebration of the possibilities of the *qaṣīda* and the *ʿarabīya*, these Bedouin warriors cherished their vehicles of war and chase, the she-camel and the horse, as well as their weaponry and armaments, and brought to perfection their mastery of the razzia and the hunt, informed by a notion of war as inseparable from religion.[68]

It was this complex which, among many other features, such as divine revelation in a linguistically dazzling Qur'ān, the messianic appeal of the apocalyptic (many of the Qur'anic echoes in early Arabic poetry are of eschatological *āyas*), the reformation of an ancestral Ibrahimic religion common to the speakers of the *ʿarabīya* centred on the Kaʿba in Mecca and the Islamicisation of the tribal *ghazwa* as the Muslim *jihād*, the divine mandate of which was corroborated by military successes), enabled Muḥammad to found a viable Islamic *umma*, an *umma* energized by tribalist patterns and practices, one which sought to recalibrate but not to dissolve or supersede them (contrary to what is sometimes maintained).[69] Moreover, the relationship of Prophet Muḥammad and the early Muslims to the poets and their poetry is complex and by no means as univocal as some responses to Qur'anic pronouncements on poetry might lead us to believe. That 'Bedouinising' *qaṣīda* poetry at its height, the emergence of the Arabian sanctuary of the Ibrahimic Kaʿba and an 'Arabic Qur'ān' are coterminous hardly seems a coincidence: these discourses crossfertilised each other remarkably, as their coexistence was explored, articulated and experimented with. In a simple sense, the Arabic of the *qaṣīda* poetry was a necessary condition for a divine revelation in Arabic.[70]

[67] NADIA JAMIL, *Playing for Time:* Maysir-*Gambling in Early Arabic Poetry*, in: *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings. Studies in Honour of Alan Jones*, ed. ROBERT G. HOYLAND and PHILIP F. KENNEDY, Oxford: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004, p. 48-90 (p. 67).

[68] JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 68.

[69] For an extreme statement of the exclusivist reading of the *umma*, against which I am reacting, see DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 55-62 and passim (according to this view, embracement of Islam is akin to discipleship of Christ: the abandonment of all other social, cultural and ideological ties), and following him, FOWDEN, *Empire to Commonwealth*, p. 153. The intellectual and linguistic cosmos within which the contingencies and tensions of such a bold experiment were to be explored was that of the *ʿarabīya*: KHALIDI, *Arabs*.

[70] See generally MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries* (Chapter Six: *Poetry in the Early Islamic Period*), p. 209-257; MICHAEL ZWETTLER, *A Mantic Manifesto: the* Sūra *of 'The Poets' and the Qurʾānic Foundations of Prophetic Authority*, in: *Poetry and Prophecy: the*

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THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

Consider how radically differently a picture of pre-Islamic Arabia is drawn in the following poetic *vita*, the biography of the most famous of all pre-Islamic poets the princeling Imru' al-Qays of the North Arabian branch of the South Arabian tribe of Kinda.[71] Such is his reputation that he is named in later Muslim tradition as the leader of the poets in Hell. What follows is principally a digest of the entry on Imru' al-Qays composed by the bureaucrat and scholar Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī (d. ca. 363/972) in his *Kitāb al-Aghānī al-Kabīr*, his Major Book of Songs.[72]

Beginnings of Literary Tradition, Ithaca - London: Cornell University Press, p. 75-119, 205-231; ALAN JONES, *Poetry and Poets*, in: *EQ*, IV, p. 110-114; and on the Ka'ba, see the two articles by URI RUBIN, *The Ka'ba: Aspects of its Ritual Functions and Position in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Times*; and: *Ḥanīfiyya and Ka'ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of* Dīn Ibrāhīm, in: PETERS, *The Arabs and Arabia*, p. 313-347 and p. 267-294; together with DONNER's discussion of adherence to religious cults as social binding: *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 28. See, however, the counter arguments, largely concerning the problems of the semantic indeterminacy of the titles *allāh* and *rabb al-bayt* and the continued veneration at Mecca of Ḥubal and al-'Uzzā, mustered by PAVEL PAVLOVITCH, Qad kunna (sic) lā na'budu 'llāha wa-lā na'rifuhu. *On the Problem of the pre-Islamic Lord of the Ka'ba*, in: *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 2 (1998-1999), p. 49-74 (www.uib.no/jais).

[71] The Northern Kinda were Christian, despite al-Ḥārith's brief flirtation with Mazdakism: see TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity*, p. 276-278; the Kinda of the Ḥaḍramawt were Jews: M. LECKER, *Kinda on the Eve of Islam and during the Ridda*, in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1994), p. 333-356; *Judaism among Kinda and the* Ridda *of Kinda*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 115 (1995), p. 635-650. In these extremely rich articles, Lecker documents the transition of Kindite supremacy from the Banū Ḥujr Ākil al-Murār, the branch to which Imru' al-Qays belonged (and who, according to IBN ḤABĪB, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, ed. ILSE LICHTENSTÄDTER, Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmānīya, 1942, p. 267.5 owed their hegemony of the market at al-Rābiya in Ḥaḍramawt to their preferment by Quraysh [*bi-faḍl quraysh*]: see KISTER, *Mecca and Tamīm*, p. 156-157) to the Banū l-Ḥārith al-Wallāda, after the return to Ḥaḍramawt toward the end of the Sixth Century, and generally connected with the Persian conquest of South Arabia: see LECKER, *Ridda*, p. 336-337; GUNNAR OLINDER, *Āl al-Ǧaun of the Family of Ākil al-Murār*, in: *Le Monde Orientale* 25 (1931), p. 208-229 (on the Kinda of al-Yamāma and their demise: Arabic translation available in *Mulūk Kinda*, p. 181-208); M.J. KISTER, *The Campaign of Ḥulubān. A New Light on the Expedition of Abraha*, in: *Le Muséon* 78 (1965), p. 425-436 (reprinted as Article IV in *Studies in Jāhiliyya* (for Abū [l]-Jabr, of this dynastic branch of the tribe, who was the commander of Abraha's troops in 552, as mentioned in Inscription Ry 506). Kindite hegemony, in terms of its political structures, is variously described as 'a supra-tribal organization' (IRFAN KAWAR [SHAHID], *Procopius and Kinda*, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 53 [1960], p. 74-78 [p. 76]), as the 'nomad alliance-state of Kinda' (TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity*, p. 267) and as 'the first record of a properly Bedouin "monarchy"' (BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*, p. 46-52). That the ruling dynasties of Kinda experimented with a variety of political structures in the course of their long hegemony seems evident, and one should not underestimate the paradigmatic influence of the South Arabian kingdom of Ḥimyar: in so many ways, Kinda forms a bridge between Ḥimyar and Medina, whilst bearing many similarities with such

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This biography is mythopoesis, driven in part by the desire to read biography into every verse of poetry transmitted under the name of Imru' al-Qays.[73] While I am primarily interested in the picture which al-Iṣfahānī draws, a picture in which the Ḥijāz and pre-Islamic Arabia are completely and comprehensively integrated into the Late Antique world, my concern is also with mythopoetic memory as opposed to the chimera of 'historical' accuracy.[74]

But first, ponder the following case of mistaken identity. Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/1262) recounts the following anecdote of the ʿAbbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/813-833) in what purport to be his own words:

> I passed through Ankara ... and I saw the image [i.e. the statue] of Imru' al-Qays ... The Greeks in Ankara had made an image of [him] as they do with those they venerate.[75]

tribal confederations as the Tanūkh (on the formation of which in al-Baḥrayn, see AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, ed. M.J. DE GOEJE et al., I, Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901, p. 746.5-7; *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume IV. The Ancient Kingdoms*, trans. MOSHE PERLMANN, Albany: SUNY, 1987, p. 129; IRFAN SHAHID, 'Tanūkh', *EI*2, X, p. 190-192; TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity*, p. 267, footnote 63, mistakenly substitutes Taghlib for Tanūkh). I have not been able to consult CHRISTIAN ROBIN, *Le Royaume ḥujride, dit 'Royaume de Kinda', entre Ḥimyar et Byzance*, in: *Comptes rendus des scéances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 1996, p. 665-714. The complexities involved in studying tribal politics through such a fluid tradition as genealogy at this present remove are well brought out by DONNER, *The Bakr b. Wā'il Tribes*. For an exemplary study of such issues, see ZWETTLER, *Ma'add*.

[72] ABŪ L-FARAJ AL-IṢFAHĀNĪ, *Kitāb al-Aghānī al-Kabīr*, IX, Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīya, 1936, p. 77-107.

[73] See JULIA BRAY, *'Abbasid Myth and the Human Act: Ibn 'Abd Rabbih and Others*, in: *On Fiction and* Adab *in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. PHILIP F. KENNEDY, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005, p. 1-54.

[74] ALBRECHT NOTH and LAWRENCE I. CONRAD, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-Critical Study*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994, p. xi: 'Arabic-Islamic historical tradition contains much which, however richly it may inform us about the perceptions and views of later times, reveals nothing *per se* about the historical object of the discussion'. Compare the approach of MICHAEL ZWETTLER, *The Poet and the Prophet: Towards Understanding the Evolution of a Narrative*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), p. 313-388: 'some crucial issues of early Islamic history and culture can be glimpsed between the lines of the evolving narrative representation of the confrontation between Prophet and poet' (p. 319). The extent to which the biography is exegetical of remarkable verses in the poet's *dīwān* can easily be appreciated from a perusal of the scrupulous connection of *khabar* with originary *bayt* carried out by GUNNAR OLINDER, *The Kings of Kinda*, in: *Lunds Universitets Årsskrift* 23/6 (1927), p. 94-118; Arabic translation, with valuable notes: *Mulūk Kinda min Banī Ākil al-Murār*, trans. ʿABD AL-JABBĀR AL-MUṬṬALIBĪ, Baghdād: Maṭba'at al-Ḥukūma, 1973, p. 152-180. For Olinder, however, the *bayt* provides corroborative documentary evidence for the *khabar*.

[75] Quoted from MICHAEL COOPERSON, *The Grave of al-Ma'mūn in Tarsus: A Preliminary Report*, in: *'Abbasid Studies*, ed. J.E. MONTGOMERY, Peeters: Leuven, 2004, p. 55. See further IRFAN SHAHID, *The Last Days of Imru' al-Qays: Anatolia*, in: *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature*, ed. I.J. BOULLATA and T. DEYOUNG, Fayetteville:

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It is improbable that the statue which al-Ma'mūn admired was a likeness of a pre-Islamic prince-poet erected in Ankara, and it has been suggested that what he may have been referring to was a pagan monument (possibly the Augusteum, temple of Roma and Augustus).[76] What then are we to make of the Caliph's imaginings? We could begin by noting that, in a bold act of cultural supremacy, the Caliph who is credited the most in our sources, both ancient and modern, with sponsoring the comprehensive translation into Arabic of the Greek and Late Antique intellectual heritage, is in little doubt as to the fact that the Arabs (as symbolized by their most famous poet and most tragic hero) have eclipsed the Rūm (an ethnonym which also includes what we would understand as Roman antiquity) to the point that they have dedicated a monumental statuary to Imru' al-Qays, one instance of the multiple facets of early ʿAbbasid identity of which this interpretative act of appropriation is the product. But is this little more than wishful thinking on the part of a Caliph who considered himself to be God's mouthpiece on earth? Or might there be some other reason for the Caliph to think that Imru' al-Qays was a figure of such importance to the Greeks? In other words, who was Imru' al-Qays and why was he in Ankara?

The second question is readily answered: his presence in Ankara is a biographical exegesis of the occurrence of the toponym *anqira* (rare in *jāhilī* poetry), in a piece of *rajaz* verse which was read as the last verses declared by Imru' al-Qays on his deathbed.[77] Such exegesis is the very inspiration of the narrative elaborations of this life.

University of Arkansas Press, 1997, p. 207-222, a modern application of the exegetical principles underpinning al-Iṣfahānī's biography, in which he is hoist with his own petard, having in an earlier publication criticized another scholar's reconstruction of Imru' al-Qays's biography as an 'unhappy attempt in accepting from the Arabic tradition accounts whose quality ranges from the purely fictitious and imaginary to the highly dubious and hypothetical', and the incorporation of them as 'established facts into a historical account deriving from a primary source': IRFAN KAWAR (SHAHID), *Byzantium and Kinda*, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 53 (1960), p. 57-73.

[76] CLIVE FOSS, *Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), p. 77 (reference taken from SHAHID, *The Last Days*, p. 221).

[77] References are to the three basic editions of his poems: *The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets*, ed. W. AHLWARDT, London: Trübner, 1870 (the reference is to poem number, then verse); *Six Early Arab Poets. New Edition and Concordance*, ed. ALBERT ARAZI and SALMAN MASALHA, Jerusalem: Max Schlossinger Memorial Series, 1999 (the reference is to the marginal numbers and the subsequent numbering of the lines: as this is a reissue of Ahlwardt's edition, the marginal numeration refers to his original pagination); *Dīwān*, ed. MUḤAMMAD ABŪ L-FAḌL IBRĀHĪM, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1958 (reference is to poem number, then verse number, then page). For the *bayt*: (Ahlwardt) poem 28.4 (Arazi-Masalha, 133.17; Ibrāhīm, poem 94.4, p. 349). It is by no means certain that Ankara is meant by *anqira* and the *rajaz* verses are extremely

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Imru' al-Qays's name means, 'the man of al-Qays',[78] and he is accorded two other titles, *al-malik al-ḍillīl*, the errant princeling, and *dhū l-qurūḥ*, the man of the weeping sores (*Agh.*, p. 78.2-3). Dates of birth and death are not, of course, to be expected,[79] though he is said to have been born among the tribe of Asad, and to have lived in either the fort of al-Mushaqqar located in al-Yamāma[80] or a fort located in the area designated in classical Arabic as al-Baḥryan, i.e. East Arabia, and the northern litoral of the Persian Gulf in particular (p. 78.6-7).

Al-Iṣfahānī's begins his composite account (p. 78.15-79.3)[81] of the poet's life with the career of his great-grandfather, ʿAmr al-Maqṣūr, whose mother is alleged to have been one of the royal family of South Arabia, known as the Tubbaʿ (p. 79.5), and it is with the help of the kings of Ḥimyar that the founder of the dynasty, ʿAmr's father, Ḥujr Ākil al-Murār is said to have taken control of the tribes of northern and

non-committal and vague, containing nothing, beyond a future tense, to hint at a deathbed utterance. These are the kind of verses which posed the ultimate exegetical and imaginative challenge for the biographers. Cf. also SHAHID, *The Last Days*, p. 211-213. On the technique of verbal correspondence between exegetical *khabar* and evidentiary *bayt* (in the form of a quotation, echo or allusion), see WERNER CASKEL, *Aijām al-ʿArab. Studien zur altarabischen Epik*, in: *Islamica* 4 (1931), p. 1-99 (p. 66-75, 'Das Verhältnis der Verse zur Prosa'); ZWETTLER, *Poet and Prophet*, identifies such accounts as '(usually) aetiological narratives' (p. 325, footnote 57).

[78] It has been suggested that this is a theophoric and would thus mean 'worshipper of the god al-Qays'. I am inclined to see it in the context of ancestor worship, as with a considerable number of other theophorics, such as the name of the Prophet Muḥammad's grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, or the items on Medinan idolatry provided by al-Maqrīzī and discussed by MICHAEL LECKER, *Idol Worship in pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)*, in: PETERS, *The Arabs and Arabia*, p. 129-144. On ancestor worship: HENNINGER, *Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion*, p. 109-128; on the problem of the theophorics: THEODOR NÖLDEKE, *Arabs (Ancient)*, in: *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, I, p. 659-673 (p. 659-660); TILMAN SEIDENSTICKER, *Zur Frage eines Astralkultes im vorislamischen Arabien*, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136 (1986), p. 493-511, especially, p. 503-506 and 508-509.

[79] SHAHID, *The Last Days*, p. 217 claims that 'the year A.D. 542 ... emerges as the one precise and certain date for the death of a pre-Islamic poet', and thus for the very history of the development of the *qaṣīda*. His evidence is pure exegesis tempered only by speculation and makes the foundations of a house of cards seem solid.

[80] On al-Mushaqqar, see IMRU' AL-QAYS, *Dīwān* (Ahlwardt) poem 20.7 (Arazi-Masalha, 128.15; Ibrāhīm, poem 4.5, p. 57; KISTER, *Mecca and Tamīm*, p. 130; 'a harbour-city frequented by merchants from Persia, an important base of Persian rule'.

[81] See S. BOUSTANY, 'Imru' al-Ḳays b. Ḥudjr', *EI*2, III, p. 1177, for the competing accounts of his biography (Kufan, Basran, and Baghdadi). ZWETTLER, *Poet and Prophet*, remarks that Ibn Qutayba provides two versions of the episode involving Kaʿb b. Zuhayr and Prophet Muḥammad (p. 322, footnote 33). For details relating to the members of this dynasty, see OLINDER, *The Kings of Kinda* (= *Mulūk Kinda*): Ḥujr: p. 39-46 (= p. 70-84); ʿAmr: p. 47-50 (= p. 85-91); al-Ḥārith: p. 51-69 (= p. 92-120); his sons: p. 70-93 (= p. 122-151); Imruʾ al-Qays: p. 94-118 (= p. 152-180).

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central Arabia, known collectively as Maʿadd (p. 81.7-8).[82] Upon his death at the hands of the Ghassanid al-Ḥārith b. Abī Shamir (p. 81.11-12), ʿAmr is succeeded by al-Ḥārith, king during the rule of the Sasanid Qubādh b. Fayrūz (Kavād son of Perōz) (488-496, 498/9-531), in whose reign Mazdak preached his social and religious reforms.[83] Qubādh's support of the religious reform of Mazdak is shared by al-Ḥārith the Kindite but not by the Lakhmid governor of the military cantonment of al-Ḥīra, al-Mundhir b. Mā' al-Samā', who is ousted by Qubādh and replaced with al-Ḥārith (p. 79.4-14) in residence at al-Anbār (p. 80.5).[84] According to another version (that of Ibn Qutayba), al-Ḥārith owes his kingship to the last of the Tubbaʿ kings (p. 81.7-8).

[82] See ZWETTLER, *Maʿadd*: this article also provides *en passant* an excellent sketch of the history of Kinda in epigraphical and Greek sources: p. 241, 244-246 (Kinda in Ry 509), 248-250 (Kinda in Ry 506), 257-257 (Qays b. Salama). An inscription discovered and published by Ryckmans from the Fifth Century mentions Ḥujr son of ʿAmr King of Kiddat: see GONZAGUE RYCKMANS, *Inscriptions Sud-Arabes*, in: *Le Muséon* 69 (1956), p. 152; see also JACQUELINE PIRENNE, *L'Inscription «Ryckmans 535» et la chronologie sud-arabe*, in: *Le Muséon* 69 (1956), p. 165-181; IWONA GAJDA, *Ḥuǧr b. ʿAmr roi de Kinda et l'établissement de la domination ḥimyarite en Arabie centrale*, in: *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 26 (1996), p. 65-73 and Plate 1.

[83] M. GUIDI and M. MORONY, 'Mazdak', *EI*2, VI, p. 949-952; P. CRONE, *Kavād's Heresy and Mazdak's Revolt*, in: *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 29 (1991), p. 21-42; Z. RUBIN, *The Reforms of Khusro Anūshirwān*, in: *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, III: States, Resources and Armies*, ed. AVERIL CAMERON, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995, p. 227-298 (especially p. 228-231); JOSEF WIESHÖFER, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD*, trans. AZIZEH AZODI, London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, p. 208-210; GEOFFREY GREATREX, *Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century*, in: MAAS, *Age of Justinian*, p. 482-486. The importance of the religious orientation of the (dynastic) elites of the Arabian confederations for tribal politics is well brought out by DONNER, *The Bakr b. Wā'il Tribes*, p. 25-26. The situation is not too dissimilar, for example, from the adoption of Islam by the King of the semi-sedentary Volga Bulghār in the early Fourth/Tenth Century visited by Ibn Faḍlān: their Islam was at first confined to the ruling elite and was chosen as a politico-religious antidote to the Judaism of the Khazar aristocracy: see JAMES E. MONTGOMERY, *Ibn Faḍlān*, in: *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. SPEAKE, II, London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003, p. 578-580; *Travelling Autopsies: Ibn Faḍlān and the Bulghār*, in: *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7 (2004), p. 4-32. For all its appeal (in view of Mazdak's proposed pacifist abolition of personal property, and of marriage [as an index of personal property]), it is unwise to connect the Mazdakism of Imru' al-Qays's grandfather with the poet's notorious treatment of women as disposable sexual objects: see AL-TAHIR AHMAD MAKKI, *Imru' al-Qays*, in: *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925* (*Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 311), ed. MICHAEL COOPERSON and SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA, Detroit etc.: Thomson Gale, 2005, p. 212-224 (p. 215). On al-Ḥārith, see TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity*, p. 269-273; KAWAR (SHAHID), *Byzantium and Kinda*.

[84] See KISTER, *al-Ḥīra*, p. 145 for this adoption of Mazdakism. Note that the reference to Ḥujr b. ʿAdī Ākil al-Murār's *zandaqa* in AL-YAʿQŪBĪ, *Al-Ta'rīkh*, ed. M.TH. HOUTSMA, Leiden: Brill, 1883, p. 299.1, is a textual emendation. The context is pre-Islamic chieftains and notables who were Christian!

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Earlier in their kingly career, a branch of the Kinda had their base at Qaryat Dhāt Kahl ('the township with the shrine of the god Kahl'), famous today as Qaryat al-Faw the excavations of which were published by Ali al-Ansary,[85] 'an impressive town, comprising a market, palace, temple, tombs and houses,' with notables 'wealthy enough to commission fine frescoes and grand statues and to import high-quality objects of glass, metal and ivory'.[86] The Hellenism of these frescoes is discussed by Glen Bowersock, who speaks of how 'here in the center of the Arabian peninsula Hellenism inspired a hitherto unsuspected commemoration of local prosperity and culture'.[87]

Upon the accession of Khusraw as Anūshirwān (the Immortal Soul) to the Sasanid throne, bitterly hostile to Mazdak's religious reforms, according to our account, and the attendant return to favour of the Lakhmid al-Mundhir, al-Ḥārith is driven out of north-eastern Arabia by a contingent of Taghlib, Bakr and Iyād tribesmen under the leadership of al-Mundhir (p. 79.14-80.16). Imru' al-Qays's grand-father is said to have died in the territory of the Kalb (p. 81.1-6) in the year 528, but not before, according to another account, going 'over to the Byzantines, who assigned to him a phylarchate in Palestine' though subsequently having to abandon that territory too, after quarreling with 'Diomede, the *dux* of that province'.[88] Before his death, al-Ḥārith divided rule over the tribes of Maʿadd among his four sons, with Ḥujr, the father of Imru' al-Qays, accorded control over the Banū Asad and Ghaṭafān, and thus being lord of the territory traditionally known as al-Tihāma (p. 81.11-82.5).[89]

The most significant event in Imru' al-Qays's life is the death of his father Ḥujr at the hands of the Banū Asad. There are various accounts of this occurrence (p. 84.1-86.20), just as a number of reasons are adduced for the breakdown of relations between father and son before the former's death (p. 87.12-89.5), the favourite being the son's debauched and dissolute lifestyle. Imru' al-Qays is told of his father's murder while in the Yemen (p. 87.18), and the remainder of his life is devoted to fulfilling his vow of vengeance, in pursuit of an all-consuming vendetta.

[85] ALI AL-ANSARY, *Qaryat al-Fau. A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia*, Riyadh - London: Croom Helm, 1982. See also his *Aḍwāʾ Jadīda ʿalā Dawlat Kinda khilāl Āthār Qaryat al-Fau wa-Nuqūshi-hā*, in: *Sources for the History of Arabia, Part 1*, 1 (1979), p. 3-11 (Arabic); BOWERSOCK, *Hellenism*, p. 74-75.

[86] HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 50.

[87] *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, p. 75 and plates 12 and 13.

[88] IRFAN SHAHID, 'Kinda', *EI*2, V, p. 118.

[89] On Ḥujr, see TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity*, p. 275.

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This vendetta takes him to the tribal confederations of Bakr and Taghlib, who provide him with short-lived assistance; then back to Lakhmid territory under the protection of his maternal cousin ʿAmr b. al-Mundhir (p. 92.2-8); then to Ḥimyar (p. 90.12-92.2) where another kinsman grants him assistance but dies and whence he is expelled by his kinsman's successor, Qarmal (p. 92.9-92.16). With the help of Marthad al-Khayr's troops and a disparate group of mercenaries, he is able to conquer the Banū Asad (p. 92.17-93.4), but now he is the hunted bounty of the forces of al-Mundhir the Lakhmid and a group of Sasanid heavy cavalry dispatched by Anūshirwān. Al-Ḥārith b. Shihāb of the Banū Yarbūʿ b. Ḥanẓala is unable to protect him and his clansmen against the threats of al-Mundhir (p. 93.6-14), and so Imru' al-Qays seeks refuge in the territory of Ṭayyi' (p. 93.14), among whom war breaks out, on his account (p. 96.10-11). He finally finds full protection at the fortress of al-Samaw'al in Taymā' (p. 96.17-99.4), where he is graciously received.[90]

It is at this point that a most remarkable incident in his life takes place — at Imru' al-Qays's request, al-Samaw'al writes to the Ghassanid phylarch al-Ḥārith b. Abī Shamir to secure him access to the court of Qayṣar, where Justinian (r. 527-565) welcomes him, gives him a royal lodging and then provides him with a large military force (the purpose of which is not specified, though reconquest of ancestral domains seems implied) (p. 99.4-10).[91] The hostility of the house of Asad, however, re-emerges

[90] See THOMAS BAUER, 'al-Samaw'al b. ʿĀdiyā', *EI*2, VIII, p. 1041-1042; RODINSON, *Mohammed*, p. 29; the poem by al-Aʿshā Maymūn in which the story concerning al-Samaw'al's sacrifice of his son to preserve his honour intact is mentioned has been translated by ALAN JONES, *Narrative Technique in the Qur'ān and Early Arabic Poetry*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25 (1994), p. 185-191. BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*, p. 276, implausibly interprets the incident in terms of the 'entrenched hold' of usury, rather than honour.

[91] This royal visit is unattested in any of the Byzantine sources and even SHAHID, *The Last Days*, p. 209 is constrained to concede 'that arguments may be advanced' for its occurrence and for its non-occurrence. It is an exegetically driven narrative response to the four occurrences of the regnal title *qayṣar* in the poet's *dīwān* (Ahlwardt, poems 13.4, 20.21 and 20.43, fragment 5.4; Arazi-Masalha, p. 123.3, 129.10, 130.13, 197.14; Ibrāhīm, poem 46.5, p. 213, poem 4.34, p. 65, and 4.47, p. 69, poem 54.8, p. 252), perhaps influenced by memories of the visit of an Amorkesos (Imru' al-Qays) to the court of Leo (r. 457-474) in the Fifth Century and of another Kindite, Imru' al-Qays's cousin Qays ibn Salama, discussed by IRFAN SHAHID (KAWAR), *On the Patriciate of Imru'-al-Qays*, in: *The World of Islam. Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti*, ed. J. KRITZECK and R. BAYLY WINDER, London: Macmillan, 1959, p. 74-82 (on the confusion, see p. 81-82); *Byzantium and Kinda*, respectively. See further his discussions in: *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library Collection, 1989, p. 59-91; *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, I, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library Collection, 1995, p. 158-160 and 187-188. D.G. LETSIOS, *The Case of Amorkesos and the Question of the Roman Foederati in Arabia in the Vth Century*, in: *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel*

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in the person of al-Ṭammāḥ, whose brother had been killed by our poet.[92] Whether through the conspirings of al-Ṭammāḥ, or a change of heart actuated by fear of the consequences of unleashing such a mighty force into the territory of the ʿArab under the leadership of such a singular individual, or because Imru' al-Qays was in secret amorous correspondence with Justinian's (non-existent) daughter and had composed shameful verses celebrating this amour (p. 99.10-14) (or had seen him in the bathroom), Qayṣar

> sent to him at that point a ceremonial robe, richly embroidered, stitched with gold, and soaked in poison, with the words, 'I have sent you a ceremonial robe which I myself have worn, in honour of you. When you receive it, don it as an auspicious blessing, and write to me to inform me of your progress from place to place'. He put it on when it arrived and he took great delight in it. But the poison quickly took effect and his skin started to fall off. This is why he was called the 'man of the weeping sores' (p. 99.14-100.2).

As a result of Justinian's 'shirt of Nessus', explicitly acknowledged by al-Iṣfahānī as an exegetical elaboration of the cognomen derived from the occurrence in his poetry of the substantive *qarḥ*,[93] Imru' al-Qays died in Byzantine territory sometime around 550 AD.

In Imru' al-Qays's poetry, the regal pretensions of this dynasty of Kinda (a tribe who, at the peak of their wealth and power, were able, a few centuries earlier, to mint their own coins) are combined with a celebration of the ideal of the noble, morally inflexible Bedouin, to provide a fusion of ideological, cultural and emotional values which contrasts sharply with the nomadic sterility and political chaos of the traditional picture of pre-Islamic Arabia. Before we leave this tragic and tormented figure, let us pause to reflect on the network of kinship represented by his clan of Kinda, which stretched from Ḥimyar in South Arabia to the court of the Sasanid emperor and his vassal Lakhmids in al-Ḥīra, from a Jewish poet-warrior in Taymāʾ to the Jafnid phylarchy in Syria and on to

(*Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 24-27 juin 1987*), ed. T. FAHD, Leiden: Brill, 1989, p. 525-538 ('Amorkesos was not chosen by the Byzantines but imposed upon them by the circumstances', p. 538). For a possibly cognate instance of collective memory, see ZWETTLER, *Maʿadd*, p. 225, footnote 3, who suggests that al-Ṭabarī's reference to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of the 'peninsular Arabs' is 'perhaps an imaginative retrojection of Shāpūr II's massive campaign against the Bedouins during the early fourth century'.

[92] This proper noun is taken from the phrase *la-qad ṭamaḥa l-ṭammāḥu* in Imru' al-Qays's *Dīwān*, where the definite substantive is clearly not intended as a proper noun: see (Ahlwardt) poem 30.13 (Arazi-Masalha, 135.7; Ibrāhīm, poem 13.13, p. 108).

[93] See *Dīwān* (Ahlwardt) poems 30.12, 32.3 and 4 (Arazi-Masalha, 135.6, 136.7, 136.8; Ibrāhīm, poem 13.12, p. 107, and poem 80.3 and 4, p. 339).

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the court of Justinian. Moreover, his vendetta also involved most of the major tribes and tribal confederations in the peninsula, from the Christian Iyād to Bakr and Taghlib to the Banū Asad.[94]

The poet's *vita* also encapsulates some perdurable identity issues: the pre-Islamic notion of kingship which the Islamic notion of caliphate often accommodated, especially during the reign of the Umayyad dynasty (41-132/661-749-50); the heady admixture of Bedouin inflexibility and regal nobility; the demise of the dynasties of Kinda, Jafn and Naṣr and the waning of their sponsored religions in the peninsula; tribal identity and the negotiation of extended networks of influence; the enmity, mistrust and suspicion which later obtained between the Islamic imperium and the Byzantine and Sasanid empires.

However, Imru' al-Qays's various identities are so manifestly fashioned for him out of his poetry that we should also ponder the dynamics of the cultural tradition to which his biography belongs. In short, the biographies of pre-Islamic poets were constructed broadly in accordance with the scholarly principles refined in Qur'anic exegesis (*Tafsīr*), and specifically in accordance with that branch of exegesis and juridical thought known as 'the occasions of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the process whereby the dating of the verses of the Qur'ān were determined in correspondence with the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. Every word of a poet's poetic oeuvre (his *dīwān*) was pored over with a view to finding clues that would facilitate the composition of biographies. The relationship between the validity of this method as exegesis and as biography is symbiotic, the success of the one justifying the applicability of the other and vice-versa.

Poetic vitae performed for the Islamic intellectual consciousness of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Centuries a function similar to the function of hagiographies and tales of the miraculous in the early medieval West:

[94] Among the many achievements with which the Arabian hegemony of the Kinda is credited is the creation of a 'high Arabic': see CASKEL, *Bedouinization*, p. 44 and generally SHAHID, *Kinda*, p. 118-119. According to Jan Retsö's theory of the creation of 'a professional class of warriors all over Arabia' by 'the hiring of professional soldiers by the Himyaritic kings from among the tribes', Kinda would be one of the many groups of professional soldiery which flooded the Arabian peninsula in the wake of the collapse of Ḥimyar in South Arabia: *The Road to Yarmuk* p. 39; for Kinda, see p. 38. See further HERMANN VON WISSMANN, *Ḥimyar, Ancient History*, in: *Le Muséon* 77 (1964), p. 487-489 (for Kinda under the reign of Shammār Yuharʿish III). WHITTOW, *Rome and the Jafnids*, p. 219-223 is an accomplished discussion of the impact which warrior-tribes could have on the complexion of the peninsula. Such martial prowess (among the Bedouin warrior elite) continued well into the early Islamic period: JOHN W. JANDORA, *Developments in Islamic Warfare: The Early Islamic Conquests*, in: *Studia Islamica* 64 (1986), p. 101-113.

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they were 'ideal vehicles for the early medieval penchant for dramatizing abstract ideas and moral concepts'.[95] One of the abstract ideas which Imru' al-Qays's biography as it developed over time seems to have conveyed is captured in the case of mistaken identity, according to which al-Ma'mūn admired the statue erected by the Greeks in honour of the pre-Islamic poet in Ankara. A monumental statuary (so prominent a feature of Roman and Byzantine imperial architecture) dedicated to a failed pre-Islamic kinglet, admired by the Caliph who did the most to sponsor the acquisition of Greek science and philosophy in Arabic, himself an emblem of ʿAbbasid intellectual exuberance and confidence, is as much a declaration of a new world order as is the Dome of the Rock built by ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65-86/685-705) in Jerusalem. Thus the statue is, like the mythic move which transferred the shirt of Nessos from Greece to Arabia, a cultural enunciation pronounced on the basis of an act of exegesis.[96]

I do not mean by this to account for Imru' al-Qays's biography simply in terms of the now standard modern exegetical strategy of legitimization: in other words, if there is a 'political impetus' behind this biography which 'is the key to its creation', it is of a general and not a specific nature, for this biography is only part of the wider ʿAbbasid phenomenon whereby such vitae were constructed, and clearly reflects the society's protean desire to fuse a multiple identity out of its pre-Islamic, Sasanid, Qur'anic, and Hellenistic heritages, by means of both the artifice and the artificiality of narrative, the literary (re)creation of 'the illusion of actuality' and the endowment of 'fragmented and disconnected events with meaning'.[97] A crucial feature of many Islamic biographies is that the anonymity of the fabricators entails the anonymity of their priorities of fabrication. Even in those cases when we can be confident that we are dealing with a composition of narrative units by one particular antiquarian (an Ibn al-Kalbī, for example), the practice, championed, for example, by al-Wāqidī, of employing combined reports tends to conceal more than it reveals.[98]

[95] CATHERINE CUBITT, *Memory and Narrative in the Cult of Early Anglo-Saxon Saints*, in: *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. YITZHAK HEN and MATTHEW INNES, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 29-66 (p. 52).

[96] The same complex of notions is also evident in the famous *bayt* ascribed to Imru' al-Qays in which he refers to the *barīd*: see *Dīwān* (Ahlwardt) poem 20.48 (Arazi-Masalha, 130.18; Ibrāhīm, poem 4.38, p. 66); generally, ADAM SILVERSTEIN, *On Some Aspects of the ʿAbbasid* Barīd, in: *ʿAbbasid Studies* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, 135), ed. JAMES E. MONTGOMERY, Leuven: Peeters 2004, p. 23-32.

[97] Quotations taken from CUBITT, *Memory and Narrative*, p. 47.

[98] M. LECKER, *Wāqidī's Account on the Status of the Jews of Medina: A Study of a Combined Report*, in: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 54 (1995), p. 15-32. See further HAYDEN WHITE, *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Balti-

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This 'positive identity' is diametrically opposed to a more pietist matrix of ideas appreciable in the sources according to which Imru' al-Qays is declared 'the standard[-bearer] of the poets to hellfire', a position based upon an interpretation of the ambiguous assessment of poets and poetry in the Qur'ān as one of outright hostility.[99]

Yet another complex of ideas, abstract and concrete, which fuelled this perfervid interest in pre-Islamic poetry and poets was their status as exemplary paragons of the *ʿarabīya*. We will search in vain for a nomadic identity in the case of Imru' al-Qays,[100] though he does, by virtue of his poetic pre-eminence, have an identity as a renowned craftsman of poems composed in the *ʿarabīya* and he is the paragon of the ʿArab warrior-poet elites who exploited its riches so captivatingly.[101] Like these warrior-poets, his identity, however multiple and mythic, is firmly anchored in the world of Late Antiquity.

more - London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. ix, 1-4, 26-82; his approach in a nutshell (on Nazism and the Final Solution): *Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth*, in: *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. KEITH JENKINS, London - New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 392-396; MATTHEW INNES and ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK, *The Writing of History*, in: *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. ROSAMOND MCKITTERICK, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 193-220 (p. 201, 216); see also *The History and Narrative Reader*, ed. GEOFFREY ROBERTS, London - New York: Routledge, 2001.

[99] Suzanne Stetkevytch's reading of the *akhbār* of Imru' al-Qays, whilst containing much which I find hard to accept, brings out admirably how the poet 'embodies the *jahl* (impetuosity) that was for Islam the essence of the pagan past, the seed of its moral and political undoing, and hence embraces all in the Jahiliyyah that was anti-Islamic': *The Mute Immortals Speak*, p. 241-285 (p. 284).

[100] It should be remembered that although composer of the most famous pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* the picture which emerges from his poetic *vita* constructed for him is not that of an archetyp(ic)al nomad (despite the recent attempt of BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*, to establish him as such). This is nowhere as obvious as in his poetic dedication to the aristocratic (as opposed to the professional) hunt, itself not typical of the tradition: ZWETTLER, *Maʿadd*, p. 243-244, footnote 40, has connected the juxtaposition of aristocratic hunt and diluvian rainstorm in his *muʿallaqa* with the Ḥimyarite ritual hunt, success in which was 'believed to ensure a propitious rainfall'. A further uncustomary feature of this poet's *dīwān* is his preference for equine over camel description.

[101] The hegemony of the *ʿarabīya* is a true, but not representative, account of the period under discussion. This is well captured in HERBJØRN JENSSEN's summary 'of the very little that can be known about Arabic before the dawn of Islam': 'we know that varieties very similar to classical Arabic were used for several hundred years before, extending over an area encompassing not only the Arabian peninsula but also parts of the Fertile Crescent. We also know that some of these varieties had sufficient prestige to be used for inscriptions and poetic composition. We do not, however, know who the users of these varieties were, what name they gave to their language, or for what other purposes, besides inscriptions and poetry, they may have used them. Nor do we know how great were the differences between the varieties in question since only one of them, classical Arabic, has been preserved for us in the form of a corpus of text and a systematic description': 'Arabic Language', in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, I, p. 130-131.

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'On the tip of a rock, hemmed in ...'[102]

This poetic life writ large brings us to the third feature of the world of Late Antiquity most frequently touched upon in the standard scholarly works on the advent of Islam: the hostility which obtained between Byzantium and Persia, or better: the struggle to the death of two rival super-powers which is said to have weakened their resources to the point that they were incapable of resisting the onslaught of the Muslim raiders from the Ḥijāz,[103] and their various interferences in the three major regions of the peninsula. In other words, how one views the emptiness of the Ḥijāz will determine how one understands the Muslim conquests and, in a vicious circle, how one accounts for these conquests will support how one views the Arabs of the peninsula, for although, as Donner remarks, 'the causes for the conquest movement itself and the causes for its success' are not the same, these phenomena are synergetic.[104] For an empty Ḥijāz means, for Muslims, past and present, that the conquests are irrefragable proof of Allāh's support and the truth of the divine revelation (the kerygmatic paradigm), while for some scholars

> the Arab conquests were made possible by their opponents' weaknesses rather than by the power of the nascent Muslim armies[105]

[102] An abbreviated translation of *ma'kūfīna 'alā ra's ḥajar bayna fāris wa-rūm* (on the tip of a rock, hemmed in between Fāris and Rūm), a dictum ascribed to Qatāda: Kister, *al-Ḥīra*, p. 143. There is an unavoidable amount of duplication in this section of the discussion in section one ('The Seductiveness of the Bedouin') of this article.

[103] A 'classic' formulation (of this plausible but 'impressionistic assumption': Benjamin Isaac, *The Army in the Late Roman East: the Persian Wars and the Defence of the Byzantine Provinces*, in: Cameron, *States, Resources and Armies*, p. 125-155) is W.M. Watt, *Muhammad Prophet and Statesman*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961 (one of his many versions of this version of events); Georges H. Bousquet, *Observations sur la nature et les causes de la conquête arabe*, in: *Studia Islamica* 6 (1956), p. 37-52. For a sample of alternate readings, see Ella Landau-Tasseron, *Features of the Pre-Conquest Muslim Army in the Time of Muḥammad*, in: Cameron, *States, Resources and Armies*, p. 299-336; James Howard-Johnstone, *The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity: A Comparison*, in: Cameron, *States, Resources and Armies*, p. 157-226; Ze'ev Rubin, *The Sasanid Monarchy*, in: Cameron, Ward-Perkins and Whitby, *Cambridge Ancient History*, p. 638-661, especially p. 659-661. Bamyeh, *The Social Origins*, p. 41-43 accounts for the emergence of Mecca as a mercantile success-story (rather than the conquests specifically) in terms of this imperial decrepitude.

[104] *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 8. I prefer to speak of Muslim rather than Islamic conquests in an attempt to avoid an over-deterministic prioritisation of 'Islam' at the expense of the agents in events, the Muslims.

[105] As Landau-Tasseron, *Features*, p. 299 remarks à propos the position of M. Canard, *L'expansion arabe: le problème militaire*, in: *Settimane di Studi del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo* 12 (1965), p. 37-63, 309-335. See the careful discussion of Fred M. Donner, *Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy in the Early*

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for such empire building is simply unthinkable from within their notion of Arabia. Contrast this with the assertion by Michael Whitby that 'the Arabs took over territory by energetic conquest, not by default on the part of their opponents'.[106] A corollary is the extent and nature, or indeed the very incidence, of the involvement of Persia and Rome in the Peninsula.[107]

Thus, the ramifications of Crone's pivotal *Meccan Trade* is to place (the absence of) the peninsula firmly in the heart of the international arena rather than to 'presuppose the exteriority of Mecca and Arabia generally to the Byzantine-Iranian sphere',[108] in the words of Fowden, whose *Empire to Commonwealth* is a persuasive analysis of the situation and the position has been taken by many scholars,[109] though few have

Islamic Conquests, in: CAMERON, *States, Resources and Armies*, p. 337-360, building on the work done in his *The Early Islamic Conquests*, the 'Introduction' of which is a concise overview of the sort of issues involved in the denial 'that the "Arab conquest" was in any organic way related to the appearance of Islam' (p. 8).
The most prominent analyst of the *futūḥ* in terms of the kerygmatic paradigm is Larry Conrad: see LAWRENCE I. CONRAD, *The Arabs*, in: *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 14: Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425-600*, ed. A. CAMERON, B. WARD-PERKINS and M. WHITBY, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 678-700: p. 679 and the references given in his footnote 7; for a survey of 'conquest' writings: AMIKAM ELAD, *The Beginnings of Historical Writing by the Arabs: The Earliest Syrian Writers on the Arab Conquests*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003), p. 65-152. The kerygmatic paradigm is entirely consistent with Byzantine imperial ideology which viewed military victory as confirmation of the rightness of an emperor's rule: see MICHAEL MCCORMICK, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; see also MICHAEL MCCORMICK, *Emperor and Court*, in: *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 14*, p. 135-163 (p. 144, for the public acclaim of victories).

[106] MICHAEL WHITBY, *Recruitment in Roman Armies from Justinian to Heraclius (ca. 565-615)*, in: CAMERON, *States, Resources and Armies*, p. 61-124 (p. 122). Other articles in this volume are useful: ISAAC, *The Army in the Late Roman East*, p. 125-155; JOHN HALDON, *Seventh-Century Continuities: the* Ajnād *and the 'Thematic Myth'*, p. 379-423.

[107] Succinct is the account of HODGSON, *The Venture of Islam*, p. 151-153.

[108] See further CRONE, *Meccan Trade*, p. 46-50 for a digest of imperial interferences.

[109] SIDNEY SMITH, *Events in Arabia in the Sixth Century*, in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16 (1954), p. 424-468; C.E. BOSWORTH, *Iran and the Arabs before Islam*, in: *The Cambridge History of Iran, III.1: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. EHSAN YARSHATER, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 593-612 (p. 602-608); DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests* ('northern and central Arabia was for centuries the arena of two kinds of political struggle ... an ongoing competition among tribal confederations' and 'between the powerful tribal confederations ... and the great states surrounding' them: p. 48); CONRAD, *The Arabs*, p. 689-695; BERKEY, *The Formation of Islam*, p. 47. See further LAPIDUS, *The Arab Conquests*, broadly recapitulated in his *A History of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 37-53: the conquests as 'an integral part of the relationship between Arabia and Middle Eastern Societies', 'an evolutionary process' (p. 50) which 'rose directly

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matched the boldness of Retsö: 'the trigger of the Arab conquest was thus Heraclius' triumph over the Sasanian Empire'.[110] As an example of the kind of activities that may have taken place, KISTER, *Al-Ḥīra* and *Mecca and Tamīm*, musters a fabulous array of source material in support of his proposition of close Persian involvement in the Ḥijāz. A dissident, though representative, voice is BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*, p. 5-6: 'with the exception of Yemen, the great powers of the time — the Romans, the Sassanids, the Abyssinians — displayed little interest in any part of the Arabian Peninsula'. This move is vital for him to stress the Arabian origins of Islam, as 'Mecca's location deep in the desert insulated the city from the fate of the other nascent trading centers that were annexed to such powers' (p. 6).

Now, al-Iṣfahānī's account of the Arabia of the tribe of Kinda tallies remarkably with Robert Hoyland's survey of Arabia during what he identifies as the 'Byzantine/Sasanian Period (c. 240-630 AD)'.[111]

This was the time when the coast of East Arabia emerged as a central locus of Sasanid sovereignty, with the establishment of centrally appointed provincial governors during the reign of Khusraw I (531-579 AD), and with control over the Arab tribes of the interior maintained through military incursions. There is also evidence of the spread of 'Nestorian' Christianity throughout the littoral and ultimately among the Arab tribes. Southern Iraq was the stronghold of the Ancient Church of the East and it was from al-Yamāma oasis that the counter-prophet Musaylima launched his evangelizing mission during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad.[112] Moreover, Sasanid political influence presumably brought with it religious influence in the form of Mazda-worship (whether as Zoroastrianism, or Manichaeism or Mazdakism), the imperial religion of the Sasanid rulers.[113]

out of the conflict of different forms of religious, social and political organization in Arabia' (p. 66); WALTER E. KAEGI, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; WALTER E. KAEGI, *Heraclius Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. For a survey of the issue of isolation or integration of the pre-Islamic Arabs, see WALTER DOSTAL, *Die Araber in vorislamischer Zeit*, in: *Der Islam* 74 (1997), p. 1-63.

[110] *The Road to Yarmuk*, p. 41.

[111] *Arabia and the Arabs*, to which the following discussion is heavily indebted. I have also found FOWDEN, *Empire to Commonwealth*, p. 100-137 especially informative.

[112] DALE F. EICKELMAN, *Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh Century Arabia*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 10 (1967), p. 17-52.

[113] See BERKEY, *The Formation of Islam*, p. 47; HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 27-32.

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In South Arabia, both Byzantium and Seleucia-Ctesiphon endeavoured to exert influence over the kings of Ḥimyar, who in the Fifth Century, as al-Iṣfahāni's account of the *vita* of Imru' al-Qays makes clear, could boast of *de facto* rule over the Arab tribes to the point that they would style themselves 'kings ... of their Arabs of the highlands and of their coasts', by which is meant Central and Northern and East Arabia.[114] The early Fourth Century witnessed treaties between the Ḥimyar King Shammār Yuhar'ish and the Sasanids, an exchange of ambassadors with the Ethiopian kingdom of Axum and the dispatch of Theophilus Indus as missionary on behalf of the emperor Constantius (r. 337-361). Relations between Axum and Ḥimyar deteriorated in the Sixth Century and led to the killing of the Martyrs of Najrān in 523 AD by the king of Ḥimyar, Yūsuf Dhū Nawās, a convert to Judaism who was himself killed by Ella Asbeha ruler of Axum. Ella Asbeha could not, however, maintain control over the province and following a rebellion, a Christian slave Abraha toppled the Axumian vassal Esimiphaeus. An inscription at the Ma'rib dam declares that he received embassies from five kingdoms — 'the Ethiopians, the Byzantines, the Persians, Mundhir of Lakhm, Harith ibn Jabala of Ghassan and his kinsman Abikarib ibn Jabala'.[115] It is Abraha who is reputed to have marched unsuccessfully on Mecca with an elephant in 552, described in *Sūra* 105 of the Qur'ān as a manifestation of divine favour in protection of His most beloved of sanctuaries.[116] In 559 AD, the Sasanids finally asserted unequivocal control over the Yemen in the form of the hero of popular oral legend, Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, and then in the form of an imperial governor Wahriz, terminating Ethiopian influence in the region once and for all. Religiously, South Arabia entertained not only its own, and very full, panoply of deities, but also contained communities of Jews and Christians, who were distinctly Monophysite (the credal allegiance of both Axum and Ghassān), despite the Chalcedonian aspirations of Byzantium eager to redeem them from the error of their ways: the Church of Ṣan'ā', constructed by artisans and masons with mosaics and materials sent from Byzantium,

[114] HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 49.
[115] HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 55.
[116] LAWRENCE I. CONRAD, *Abraha and Muḥammad. Some Observations apropos of Chronology and Literary* Topoi *in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50 (1987), p. 225-240 (reprinted as Article IV in: *The Life of Muḥammad*, ed. URI RUBIN, Aldershot: AshgateVariorum, 1998, p. 41-56).

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has been construed as an attempt to woo the South Arabian Christians from Monophysitism.[117] Mazda-worship was also to be found, in view of the extent of Sasanid involvement in the area (although once again its precise form is the matter of controversy).[118]

The corresponding period in the history of North and Central Arabia is exclusively dominated by the activities of the elite warrior confederations: the transhumant Ghassanids with their seasonal encampment at al-Jābiya (50 miles south-west of Damascus), Byzantine phylarchs, and the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīra, Sasanid kinglets and their perpetual warfare.[119] Despite (or perhaps because of) sharing a common ancestry, they not only waged war on one another but also competed ferociously as patrons of poets, their patronage of which did so much to provide the ʿArab warriors with an ideology of independence. Their Christian credal affiliations were also antagonistic, with the Naṣrids of al-Ḥīra following the Ancient Church of the East, and the Jafnids of the Roman *limes* opportunistic followers of Monophysitism.[120] Crucial in this overall development was the creation in the Sixth Century of 'super-chiefs' in the persons of al-Mundhir b. al-Nuʿmān (504-554) and al-Ḥārith b. Jabala (529-569).[121]

[117] HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 49-57; FOWDEN, *Empire to Commonwealth*, p. 109-116. On al-Qalīs, see AL-ṬABARĪ, *Taʾrīkh*, p. 934.4-936.8; *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume V. The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids and Yemen*, trans. C.E. BOSWORTH, Albany: SUNY, 1999, p. 217-221); R.B. SERJEANT and R. LEWCOCK, 'The Church (al-Qalīs) of Ṣanʿā' and Ghumdān Castle', in: *Ṣanʿā': An Arabian Islamic City*, ed. R.B. SERJEANT and R. LEWCOCK, London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983, p. 44-48; BERKEY, *The Formation of Islam*, p. 45.

[118] See BERKEY, *The Formation of Islam*, p. 47.

[119] CONRAD, *The Arabs*, p. 692-693. The Ghassanids, like Kinda during its hegemonic period, were enclosed 'nomads', presumably with an integrated tribal structure: ZWETTLER, *Maʿadd*, p. 287, footnote 101; for the concept and associated tribal structures, see MICHAEL ROWTON, *Enclosed Nomadism*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974), p. 1-30 and ZWETTLER, *Maʿadd*, p. 255-256, footnote 59, with further bibliography. WHITTOW, *Rome and the Jafnids*, presses a distinction between dynasty and tribe and is strong on the permeabilities of nomadic and sedentary lifestyles.

[120] On the matter of credal allegiances, we should bear in mind the perceptive comments of FOWDEN, *Empire to Commonwealth*, p. 133: 'the greater the number of apparent contradictions one introduced into one's postion, the wider the choice of exits from the tight corners in which one was bound to find oneself'. IRFAN SHAHID has studied in meticulous detail the monophystism of al-Ḥārith b. Jabala: *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century. Volume 1, Part 2: Ecclesiastical History*, p. 735-792. See however the important review by WHITTOW, *Rome and the Jafnids*. For an assessment of Byzantine policy involving the Ghassanids (as a threat to be contained), see MICHAEL WHITBY, *Greek Historical Writing after Procopius: Variety and Vitality*, in: *The Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. AVERIL CAMERON and LAWRENCE I. CONRAD, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992, p. 25-80; HALDON, *Seventh-Century Continuities*, p. 403-405.

[121] See HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 78-83.

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How we understand the Muslim conquests, be it as strategically and centrally coordinated and driven, and/or (as) energized by the universalizing expansionism of an (Islamic) monotheism afforced with the ideals of the aristocratic Bedouin warrior,[122] as nomadic migrations actuated by economic unsustainability, as random happenstance,[123] as imperial incapacity for countering the military novelty of the threat the tribal forces posed, as heralded by a globalising cultural discourse of Hellenism,[124] or

[122] A key implication of the argument presented in the first section of this paper is that the Muslim conquests of Syria and Iraq were in no small measure an expression of the conjunction of the 'Bedouinising' ethnogenetic matrix with the religious vision revealed in the Qur'ān. Cf. JOHN J. SAUNDERS, *The Nomad as Empire Builder: A Comparison of the Arab and Mongol Conquests*, in: *Diogenes* 52 (1965), p. 79-103; DONNER, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, passim for 'the idea that the conquests were the product of a definable movement having a powerful internal dynamic of its own, and traceable to a new religious ideology' (p. 8); RETSÖ, *The Road to Yarmuk*, p. 40.

[123] DONNER, *Centralized Authority*, designates the second scheme 'the ecological thesis' (p. 341-343) and the third 'the accidental thesis' ('the Arabs "found" themselves in possession of vast domains that, as an afterthought, they stitched together into an empire') (p. 344-345 and 359). The champions of the accidental thesis are: YEHUDA D. NEVO and JUDITH KOREN, *Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies*, in: *Der Islam* 68 (1991), p. 87-101, amplified in their *Crossroads to Islam. The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003. A subtle version of the 'accidental' thesis, and one which I find appealing for its emphasis on the contingencies and randomness of human action, is forwarded by BAMYEH, *The Social Origins*, p. 257-258 (responding to RODINSON, *Mohammed*, p. 37): 'it could be that an "Arab state", rather than being the "great need of the times", was in effect the unintended result of many developments based on pronouncements of less-profound needs. The emergence of a state out of this story can be understood in terms of structural imperatives coalescing out of unpredictable and unforeseen actions and counteractions rather than in terms of preexistent needs'.

[124] BOWERSOCK, *Hellenism*, argues that 'the legacy of Hellenism ... contributed to creating the foundations of Arab nationalism upon which Muḥammad was to build ... by bringing the Arabs together and equipping them with a sense of common identity' (p.73). The following claim is slightly more problematic: 'the emergence of Arabic court poetry was inspired by the Hellenic model ... in semitic terms pagan Arab poetry is in its complexity and rhythmic virtuosity the equal of the great Christian hymns in Syriac by Ephraem. Although both Syriac and Arabic are Semitic languages, outside traditions impelled them both to new eloquence. In the sense in which it may be said that Ephraem's hymns were Christian, the Arab odes were Hellenic' (p. 76-77). The process whereby the (indigenous) tribal pangeyric, such as many of those composed by ʿAmr b. Qamīʾa and Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā, became the court panegyric, such as those composed by al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, has yet properly to be studied: Hellenism (and for that matter Iranianism) contributed little to extant *qaṣīda* poetry, which remained resolutely 'Bedouinising', however much Iranianism and Hellenism may have set the ambience of courtliness in which these panegyrics were tested. For a study of a pre-Islamic court panegyric (the *Muʿallaqa* of al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī) and two panegyrics of Prophet Muḥammad (Kaʿb b. Zuhayr and Ḥassān b. Thābit) see MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries*, p. 147-165 and p. 222-232 (respectively). Hellenism as a cultural determinant of Islam: BOWERSOCK, *Hellenism*, p. 76: 'Hellenism had played its irrevocable part in assisting the Arabs to discover a sense of their own national identity'; or p. 81: 'at least some of the roots of Islam were embedded in that local

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as the unforeseen consequences of a multiplicity of decisions, discourses, responses and events, including the drive by the Medinan elite to control the ʿArab tribes, is intimately implicated in how we (re)construct imperial interferences in the peninsula and is inexorably determined by how we respond to the 'emptiness' of the Ḥijāz.

APHRODITE'S BODY CHAIN

A dispiriting development in many modern responses to the emptiness of the Ḥijāz (as signifier and as signified) has been the complete disregard of pre-Islamic poetry demonstrated by many of those who have recently chosen to recreate pre-Islamic Arabia. Thus Fred Donner can speak of an absence of 'contemporary documentation in the strict sense';[125] and I can find little mention of this poetry in representative articles by Lawrence Conrad or Chase Robinson;[126] Frank Peters begrudgingly notes that this poetry 'if it

Hellenism'. GARTH FOWDEN's emphasis on the profound links between universalism and monotheism (largely though not exclusively Hellenistic) is a productive way of reading certain aspects of Islamic origins: *Empire to Commonwealth. Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. See p. 137: 'both culturally and politically, Islam and its empire was already implicit in late antiquity'. In many ways, these represent amplifications of the ideas of C.H. BECKER, *Der Islam als Problem*, in: *Der Islam* 1 (1921), p. 1-21. See also AVERIL CAMERON, *The Eastern Provinces in the 7th Century AD. Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam*, in: *Hellēnismos. Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25-27 octobre 1989*, ed. S. SAID, Leiden: Brill, 1991, p. 287-313 (for the difficulties involved in accounting for what 'Hellenism' may, in its multifarious senses, have been).

[125] DONNER, *Background to Islam*, p. 511. It should be obvious by now that I can see no compelling reason to prefer such documentation (although I am not at all clear what it may be) to the 'large body of literary sources that describe what happened'. And poetry scarce merits a mention in his monograph, *Narratives of Islamic Origins. The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998. HERBERT BERG, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam. The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, Richmond: Curzon, 2000, does not even (as far as I can see) mention poetry, even though it is a conspicuous exception to his observation that 'virtually everything we know of that period, whether historical, legal, exegetical, and so forth, comes to us in the form of *ḥadīth*s or texts with *isnād*s' (p. 224).

[126] CONRAD, *The Arabs*; ROBINSON, *Reconstructing Early Islam*. It is one of the burdens of my argument that the poetry deserves more credit than Conrad's statement would allow: 'the relevant accounts, including a vast bulk of poetry, are frequently attributed to the pre-Islamic period or otherwise presented as describing events and conditions of that time, but apart from the Qur'ān the sources containing these accounts are at least two centuries later' (p. 679). In footnotes 40 (p. 684), 46 (p. 685) and 88 (p. 694), he does allow references to Zuhayr, Ḥassān b. Thābit and al-Aʿshā, and he has turned the poetry of al-Ḥassān to excellent use: *Epidemic Disease in Central Syria in the Late Sixth Century: Some New Insights from the Verse of Ḥassān ibn Thābit*, in: *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18 (1994), p. 12-58.

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tells us little of their history is useful for reconstructing their society'.[127] This represents a remarkable decline in the fortunes of the poetry of the *Jāhilīya* from the days of Nöldeke, Goldziher and Lyall, for whom it was the very bedrock of their responses to the Qur'ān and the desert ʿArab (as it was for the ʿAbbasids and as it is for many modern Muslim scholars).[128]

And yet the *qaṣīda* and *qiṭʿa* poetry of the *Jāhilīya*, for all its vexed problems of authenticity and transmission, and for all the difficulties of interpretation it poses, can be read in such a way that it becomes remarkably informative of the material culture of the peninsula (techniques and materials for writing, for example, or luxury goods such as jewelry),[129] of the details of trade in the Persian Gulf,[130] or the practice and perils of pilgrimage,[131] or of those features of the Qur'ān which the *mukhaḍram* poets responded to emotionally, aesthetically and intellectually (primarily Qur'anic eschatology).[132]

Indeed, it strikes me as perverse that scholars can discuss the nature of *Jihād* and its relations to the tribal *ghazwa* without endeavouring to understand the conceptual universe of the *ghazwa* as represented so vigorously and stridently in the poetry of, for example, ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl of the ʿĀmir ibn Ṣaʿṣaʿa.[133] This is one area in which much modern scholarship is sorely deficient in comparison with the oft-berated philologists

[127] PETERS, *The Arabs and Arabia*, p. xiii. This marks a slight advance, I think, on his earlier statement: 'the classical ode of the Arabs is poor stuff for history' (F.E. PETERS, *Allah's Commonwealth. A History of Islam in the Near East, 600-1100 AD*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973, p. 45). Compare this, for example, with ALFRED BLOCH, *Die altarabische Dichtung als Zeugnis für das Gesitesleben der vorislamischen Araber*, in: *Anthropos* 37-40 (1942-1945), p. 186-204; or with the reconstructions of the poetic universe of self-identification by MALCOLM C. LYONS, *Identification and Identity in Classical Arabic Poetry*, Warminster: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1999; or with the boldly imaginative study of this warrior society's cosmology by NADIA JAMIL, *Playing for Time*.

[128] See, for one example among many, volume one of IGNAZ GOLDZIHER, *Muslim Studies*, ed. and trans. S.M. STERN and C. BARBER, I, London: Allen and Unwin, 1967-1971. C.J. LYALL could write an article entitled, *Ancient Arabian Poetry as a Source of Historical Information*, in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1914), p. 61-73.

[129] MONTGOMERY, *The Deserted Encampment*.

[130] See Chapter Five of MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries* ('An Arab at Sea'); a slightly different version: J.E. MONTGOMERY, *Salvation at Sea? Seafaring in Early Arabic Poetry*, in: *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry*, ed. G. BORG and E. DE MOOR (= *Orientations* 5 [2001]), Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001, p. 25-48. On trade in the Gulf, see TOURAJ DARYAEE, *The Persian Gulf Trade in Late Antiquity*, in: *Journal of World History* 14 (2003), p. 1-16.

[131] J.E. MONTGOMERY, *Arkhilokhos, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī and A Complaint against Blacksmiths - or, A Funny Thing Happened to Me*, in: *Edebiyât* 5 (1994), p. 15-49.

[132] MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries*, p. 209-257.

[133] His *dīwān* has even been translated into English!: *The* Dīwāns *of ʿAbīd ibn al-Abraṣ of Asad and ʿĀmir ibn aṭ-Ṭufail of ʿĀmir ibn Ṣaʿṣaʿah*, ed. C.J. LYALL, Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1980 (1913).

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of the late Nineteenth and the first half of the Twentieth Century.[134] In addition, this is in complete contradistinction to the tradition which this scholarship seeks to represent — a constant throughout the many generations of pre-modern Arabic poetry is that poetry is the *dīwān* of the Arabs and it behooves us to understand what those who lived, created and gave voice to these various traditions understood by poetry as 'register'.[135] Otherwise, we merely foist on this past one of the many modern concepts of history, distorting it beyond recognition in the process.

As an example, let me take the body chain, the *wishāḥ*.[136] In a *ḥā'īya* Bishr b. Abī Khāzim al-Asadī describes his beloved Sulaymā as *haḍīma 'l-kashḥi jā'ilati 'l-wishāḥi*, 'slender-waisted, her body-girdle loose-(fitting)':

> The *wishāḥ* was an item of women's apparel wrapped around the waist and affixed, transversely, across the shoulders, which could be encrusted with jewels.[137]

It thus formed a cruciform shape around the wearer's breasts. There are numerous variations on this topos, in both pre-Islamic and later Arabic poetry, enough for us to be seduced by the assumption that the pre-Islamic instances of the image are as conventional as those which recur throughout the later tradition. The context of Bishr's verse is erotically charged, involving an exchange of saliva and a potent, though concise, description of a night of love-making.

During the Umayyad period such an assumption of conventionality would be without warrant. That it should also be unwarranted for the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* is established by a detour to Hoxne in Suffolk, East Anglia and scrutiny of Aphrodite's body chain.[138]

[134] A welcome break with this trend is HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 211-219. A major achievement of PATRICIA CRONE and MARTIN HINDS, *God's Caliph. Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, is the authors' inclusion of poetry within their evidence base. And I cannot commend highly enough Fowden's use of poetry to determine the intellectual universe of the patron of Quṣayr ʿAmra. And yet, the transmission of Umayyad poetry is no less *unreliable* (whatever that may mean) than that of the *Jāhilīya*.

[135] LYONS, *Identification and Identity*, designates this as 'register' poetry (see p. x-xi).

[136] My argument (which is positivistic in intent) in this section is very tenuous, probably tendentious and highly probabilistic. There are problems of geography and chronology which the extant remains do not properly allow me to bridge and I am reading these artifacts within a master narrative of pre-Islamic Arabia as an inflection of Late Antiquity. Indeed, in the case of Qusayr ʿAmra I even allow myself to read late Umayyad iconography in terms of the *Jāhilīya*.

[137] For the reference and discussion, see MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries*, p. 174.

[138] As will be apparent, this discussion, and the references, have been inspired by FOWDEN's wonderful study of the frescoes of Quṣayr ʿAmra in *Quṣayr ʿAmra*. My discussion is at its most conspicuously probabilistic here, because of my novitiate in Classical and

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One of the most remarkable pieces of Roman-British jewellery is the Hoxne body chain, one of the two clasps of which is a gold solidus of the Emperor Gratian (r. 367-383 AD), which provides the terminus post quem for the item in its current form. It is:

> A kind of gold harness constructed of flat straps of loop-in-loop chain, two of which were worn passed over the shoulders, and two under the arms, joining at strap-unions on the chest and back of the wearer.[139]

In other words, it is a *wishāḥ*. But what do Bishr's (pre-Islamic) inamorata and the Fourth Century Roman Briton have in common? To begin with, despite the numerous instances of such body chains as represented in statuary, figure-work or poetry over the centuries, and several of them are astonishingly old, these body chains are actually quite rare:

> The type, although rare, is known to have existed centuries earlier in Hellenistic times and still to have been current in the Byzantine world as late as the sixth century. Representations of body chains in wear are well known in Roman art, from mosaics and decorated silver to terracotta figurines.[140]

Islamic iconography; because I have not personally visited Quṣayr ʿAmra; because of my regard for the work done on this complex by FOWDEN and others; and because 'what we now see on Quṣayr ʿAmra's walls is to some extent the product of modern interpretation' (FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 67, and Chapter One). I am emboldened however by two considerations: the sheer diversity of the interpretations conjured up by scholarship to account for (some aspect or other of) this most enigmatic structure; and because the complex is largely a 'floating' signifier, firmly anchored in a tradition which we understand very, very poorly; for 'although Quṣayr ʿAmra's paintings quite often seem to recall particular iconographical types from the art of the Roman East, we cannot always be certain that the debt is specific and conscious, partly because as yet we are imperfectly informed even about the vocabulary of late Roman art, let alone the sources and procedures of artists employed by the Umayyads' (FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 230).

[139] CATHERINE JOHNS, *The Jewellery of Roman Britain. Celtic and Classical Traditions*, London: UCL Press, 1996, p. 96. On the Hoxne treasure, see p. 217-218 and Colour Plate 6. For a Roman-British mosaic representation, see RANUCCIO BIANCHI BADINELLI, *Rome: The Late Empire. Roman Art AD 200-400*, trans. PETER GREEN, London: Thames and Hudson, 1970, p. 210, figure 198 (a mosaic of Dido and Aeneas from Low Ham, Taunton, Devon). A Byzantine body chain: KATHARINE R. BROWN, *The Gold Breast Chain from the Early Byzantine Period in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum*, Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 1984 (which I have been unable to consult).

[140] JOHNS, *The Jewellery of Roman Britain*, p. 96. Figure 5.10 on p. 98 is an example, 'a terracotta figure from Egypt of Roman date showing a woman wearing a body chain'. Note that the woman is fully clothed, which is the exception in the representations of women clad in body chains with which I am familiar. Compare this with the following (Roman) images: the semi-nude woman with armlets, necklace and body chain in the Casa dei Vettii at Pompeii ('Il Supplizio di Dirce'): G.E. RIZZO, *La pittura ellenistico romana*, Milan: Fratelli Tres, 1929, p. 40, plate 66; Aphrodite (semi-nude, anklets,

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So their prominence (indeed predominance) in any one tradition is highly significant in itself. Secondly, their rarity is also significant:

> The wearers generally appear to be goddesses — even Venus herself, as on the mosaic from Low Ham — or nymphs, rather than mortals. The type was apparently a long-lived and traditional one, but in all probability its use was very restricted, perhaps to women of exceptionally high rank, or to specific formal occasions.[141]

So, the wearers of body chains in the ancient and Late Antique worlds are presumably either divine (Aphrodite-Venus), supernatural (nymphs), women of the highest social rank or women (of variable social status?) perhaps enformed by the divine. It is unclear whether there is any connection between these presumptions and representations of the (body chain wearing) woman as naked or (partially) clothed (nakedness, especially of the breasts, being a conspicuous, though not exclusive, feature of depictions of Aphrodite), or whether nakedness or full clothing are idiosyncratic inflections which are to be contextualised for any given tradition, in any given occurrence.[142] Nudity is, of course, always culturally significant, though its precise significance is often lost on us.

bracelets, body chain, tiara, ear-rings) and Ares (Pompeii): RIZZO, *La pittura*, plate 104; Aphrodite (semi-nude, anklets, bracelets, armlets, necklace, tiara and body chain or pendant necklace) and Adonis (Pompeii): RIZZO, *La pittura*, plate 123; JOHN R. CLARKE, *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art 100 BC - AD 250*, Berkeley - London: University of California Press, 2001, plate 12 (from the apodyterium of the Suburban Baths at Poempeii: a man performs cunnilingus on a woman clad only in a body chain); p. 168, figure 60 ('male-female couple on bed, bronze mirror cover found on Palatine, Rome [AD 69-79]: the woman, who faces the viewer, wears a necklace, body chain, armlets, bracelets and one visible anklet); p. 173, figure 64 ('male-female couple on bed, Casa dei Vettii, Pompeii'); see p. 315, note 60 for references to other depictions of body chains.

[141] JOHNS, *The Jewellery of Roman Britain*, p. 96.

[142] For a Classical Aphrodite with a body chain apparently made out of shells, see ANGELOS DELIVORRIAS, GRATIA BERGER-DOER and ANNELIESE KOSSATZ, *Aphrodite*, in: *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II.1, p. 86 = II.2, p. 78, figure 779; see also II.1, p. 109 = II.2, p. 110, figure 1083. The representation found at Khirbat Tannur near Petra during the era of Aretas IV (ca. 9 BC to 40 AD), does not sport a body chain, though 'son peplos est serré sous les seins par une ceinture', to achieve a slightly similar (though clothed) enhancement: FAWZI ZAYADINE, *Al-'Uzza-Aphrodite*, in: *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II.1, p. 167-169; II.2, p. 169-170 (figures 1-7) (II.1, p. 167). See also FAWZI ZAYADINE, *L'iconographie d'al-'Uzza-Aphrodite*, in: *Mythologie gréco-romaine, mythologie périphériques (Colloques internationaux du Centre de la Recherche Scientifique*, 593), ed. LILLY KAHIL and CHRISTIAN AUGÉ, Paris: CNRS, 1981, p. 113-118 and plates 1-11 (p. 115 and plate 3). Iconographical influence is detected by EVA BAER, *Female Images in Early Islam*, in: *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 11 (1999), p. 13-24 and plates 2-5 (p. 18) in the representation of the peplos in the statuary of Khirbat al-Mafjar.

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Instances of body chain wearing beauties have also been found at Jerash in the Trans-Jordan (from the Late Imperial era),[143] at Ephesus (early Imperial era),[144] at ʿAmmān (date unknown),[145] in Coptic Egypt (Fourth Century AD),[146] at Herakleopolis (Ahnas) in Upper Egypt (among others) (early Fifth Century),[147] and at Ctesiphon (Sixth Century).[148]

Among the most remarkable are the 'Safaitic' rock-carving of a face-less woman clad in armlets and anklets and with two bands around her waist, surmounted by a hemisphere,[149] as in so many images of Aphrodite in which the crest of her shell birthplace is made to double as the canopy of the heavens, and with what appears to be a blazing star or planet over her right shoulder;[150] and a sequence of naked female figurines from Susa

[143] J.H. ILIFFE, *Imperial Art in Trans-Jordan. Figurines and Lamps from a Potter's Store at Jerash*, in: *The Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 11 (1945), p. 1-26 (p. 10 and plate II, figures 25 and 26).

[144] BAER, *Female Images*, p. 14, figure 2.b; *Ephesos. Der neue Führer*, ed. PETER SCHERRER, Vienna: Österreichisches Archäeologisches Institut, 1995, p. 43, figure 5.

[145] MARIE-ODILE JENTEL, *Aphrodite (in Peripheria Orientali)*, in: *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, II.1, II.1, p. 154-166; II.2, p. 156-169 (p. 159 = II.2, p. 164, figure 111); FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 231, figure 59. See also the figure from Syria: JENTEL, *Aphrodite*, II.1, p. 165 = II.2, p. 169, figure 244.

[146] JENTEL, *Aphrodite*, II.1, p. 158 = II.2, p. 163, figure 89.

[147] This is a limestone figurine, Cairo Coptic Museum no. 7033: see BAER, *Female Images*, p. 14, note 11. See also FLORENCE D. FRIEDMAN, *Beyond the Pharaohs. Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to 7th Centuries AD*, Rhode Island: Museum of Art, 1989, p. 257, cat. No. 171 (fragment of a limestone frieze from a Fourth to Fifth Century tomb, the Nereid is 'elaborately coiffed ... clad in a cestus ... and holding a veil ... the deceased, upon her death, has become a nereid'); JOHN BECKWITH, *Coptic Sculpture, 300-1300*, London: Tiranti, 1963, figure 63 and p. 20 (a Nereid).

[148] RICHARD ETTINGHAUSEN, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World. Three Modes of Artistic Influence*, Leiden: Brill, 1972, plate 6, figure 19: 'stucco reliefs with female dancers from the interior of large mansion in Ctesiphon, Iraq, Sixth Century' (p. 67). There is an unusual type of body chain worn by a woman on an Iranian silver vessel (dated to between the Eighth and Tenth Centuries) kept in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg, one which does not meet in the cleavage but runs down the woman's sides: see OLEG GRABAR, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, figure 99. See also the different necklaces-cum-truncated body chains worn by two dryads in a Coptic image from about the middle of the Fifth Century: BECKWITH, *Coptic Sculpture*, figure 66.

[149] Or a veil, or an extravagant hair style ....The 'canopy' is reminiscent of the veil flaunted by the Coptic Nereid from the limestone tomb and enchanting the dancing girl depicted on a Sasanian silver drinking cup: AURELIE DAEMS, *The Iconography of Pre-Islamic Woman in Iran*, in: *Iranica Antiqua* 36 (2001), p. 1-150 (p. 59 and figure 221), with references to further examples.

[150] MELCHIOR DE VOGÜÉ, *Syrie centrale: inscriptions sémitiques*, Paris: Baudry, 1868, p. 141, figure 402; SUSANNE KRONE, *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt* (*Heidelberger Orientalische Studien*, 23), Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992, p. 581, figure 3; FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 66, note 96. There are a number of such representations in both Safaitic and Thamudic and they have been subject to a bewildering variety of interpretations from

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and dating from the Middle Elamite period (1450-1100 BC), which are understood to represent a quadripartite 'evolution towards steatopygy', i.e. excessive fat in the buttocks, though in this case the arms and thighs are also meant.[151]

In the first stage the woman is portrayed with slender hips, a pair of bracelets on each wrist, one anklet on each foot, and are adorned with a 'single *baudrier*';[152] in the second stage, her hips are fuller, the '*baudrier* is now crossed', i.e. it is a *wishāḥ*, 'a star shaped amulet rests on the chest while a rectangular jewel or clip holds the *baudrier* in place between the breasts' and 'stretch-marks are illustrated by means of two semi-circular carvings underneath the navel';[153] the third stage is typified by her broader shoulders and pronouncedly fuller hips than stages 1 and 2, while the body chain is still of the crossed type;[154] the figures of stage 4 have grotesquely steatopygous hips and arms, recalling 'an archaic tradition were (sic) women were violin or 8-shaped', and continue to

dancing girls to some sort of celestial being: see KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 299-303, for discussion with references; as far as I am aware, little attention has been paid to the body chain, the 'stretch marks' have not been properly identified and the coiffure of these figures would benefit from consideration of the description of the hair-do of the *ḥabashīya* (*zanjīya*) in the Muslim accounts of the annihilation of al-ʿUzzā, discussed below.

[151] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 13. For a fantastic verbal realization of such steatopygous beauty see the *rāʾīya* by al-Marrār b. Munqidh, an Umayyad poet, preserved as number 16 in the *Mufaḍḍalīyāt*, especially verses 63-90, a verbal opulence totally in keeping with the frescoes of Quṣayr ʿAmra. That early Arabic poets often compared women with statuettes, see Imruʾ al-Qays Ahlwardt poem 52.9; al-Nābigha Ahlwart poem 7.16; al-Aʿshā Ahlwardt poem 18.5 and 32.9; SIEGMUND FRAENKEL, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen*, Leiden: Brill, 1886, p. 271-272. I take the statues found at Qaryat al-Faw to be the kind of figure involved in the comparison: see AL-ANSARY, *Qaryat al-Fau*, p. 108, plate 1, and 120 ('statue of a lady ... made of brilliant white limestone'), though I would not rule out a representation of Aphrodite.

[152] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 13 and 91, plate 47; see A. SPYCKET, *Les figurines de Suse. Mémoire de la Délégation Archéologique en Iran*, Paris, 1992, p. 157, figures 953-1019. For an earlier example of the single sash worn from left to right and wrapped around the neck (?), see DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 11 and 90, figure 42, from the Shimashki period (2100-1900 BC).

[153] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 13 and 91, plate 48; see SPYCKET, *Les figurines*, 1992, p. 165, figures 1020-1042. Cf. the figures of the goddess NĪN-ali, «la Dame de la Ville», from Dar-Untash reproduced in R. GHIRSHMAN, *Tchoga Zanbil (Dar-Untash), Volume II: Temenos, Temples, Palais, Tombes*, Paris: Geuthner, 1968, p. 18, figure 4 (G.T.-Z. 1143); plate 57 (G.T.-Z. 921, 937 and 939); plate 80 (G.T.-Z. 1031) and the discussion of the temple on p. 16-19. These stretch marks seem fairly consistent throughout the representations covered by DAEMS. Their presence in the Safaitic rock-carving suggests that it is to be connected with the Iranian rather than the Mediterranean tradition of body chain wearing damsels.

[154] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 13 and 92, figure 49; SPYCKET, *Les figurines*, 1992, p. 168, figures 1043-1119.

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wear the body chain.[155] At all four stages, the women are depicted as cupping their breasts with their hands. Daems reports the theory of Ghirshman that:

> These Middle Elamite Susa figurines were fetishes with the imagery of the fertility goddess Manzat and were kept by women during pregnancy to protect their unborn baby. Since most of these figurines were found broken in the streets during excavation, Ghirshman suggests that after childbirth, the figurines were no longer of any use and thus were thrown away.[156]

Daems also notes that the end of the Middle Elamite period marks a termination of the production in Susa of naked female figurines until their resumption there, as bone carvings, during the Parthian era.[157]

So, it seems that at some point this ancient Iranian body chain was transmogrified into the (body-)girdle of Aphrodite, a magical accoutrement which Homer describes as:

> the elaborate, pattern-pierced zone, and on it are figured all beguilements, and loveliness is figured upon it, and passion of sex is there, and the whispered endearment that steals the heart away even from the thoughtful.[158]

In bestowing her *caestus* on Hera, Aphrodite unbounds it from her breasts.

In the Early Arabic poetic tradition, the body chain becomes a powerful (if somewhat rare) symbol of eroticism. Pre-Islamic poets such as ʿAlqama b. ʿAbada, Bishr and al-Aʿshā, as well as Umayyad poets such al-Shamardal, al-Ṭirimmāḥ, al-Akhṭal and ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa, describe their various love-interests as resplendent in their body chains.[159]

[155] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 13 and 92, figure 50; SPYCKET, *Les figurines*, 1992, p. 179, figures 1120-1133.

[156] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 13. See R. GHIRSHMAN, *La déesse nue élamite*, in: *Archäeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 1 (1968), p. 11-14 with Tafel 1 and 2 (p.12).

[157] DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 14. I shall leave an account of the iconic development of an Iranian fertility fetish into the eroticisation of the Mediterranean Aphrodite body-girdle (approximately a millennium after it had apparently fallen into representational desuetude) to art-historians.

[158] HOMER, *Iliad*, ed. DAVID T. MONROE and THOMAS W. ALLEN, II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, Book 14. 214-218; the translation is that of RICHMOND LATTIMORE, *The Iliad of Homer*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 299-300. Note that the Greek here translated as 'zone' is *himas*, which can mean in the plural a 'harness' of a chariot: see the verse of Labīd discussed in MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries*, p. 174, note 235.

[159] For an inventory of occurrences, see MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries*, p. 174 and footnotes 235, 236 and 237. Plunging necklines, such as the promiscuous couture of the singing-girl (*qayna*) described by Ṭarafa in his *Muʿallaqa* (*raḥībun qiṭābu al-jaybi min-hā*), provoked the Qurʾanic prohibition Q. 24.31 (*al-Nūr*). That they presumably belong to the same ambience of the body chain is indicated by figural representations of such singing and dancing girls on Sasanian silverware: DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 59 and figures 223 and

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Yet, it is difficult to tell in these instances whether the woman is naked, clothed or partially clothed. The eroticism of the contexts would imply some degree of nudity, but it is not clear to us, though it would presumably have been some fifteen centuries ago. Moreover, it rarely emerges at all clearly from many a *nasīb* of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* whether there is one *ḥabīb*, idealized and apotheosized, in a process whereby the multiple loves of the poets are transformed into an ideal type (a process which the subject women of Imru' al-Qays's *Muʿallaqa*, who are all different but who share their status as his conquests, seem to taunt and defy), of whether there are many, several and separate (and not simply in the sense of distinct individuals), not all of whom share the same standing in society — in other words, are some of these women slaves and concubines (such as Ṭarafa's singing-girl in his *Muʿallaqa*), are others free born (and hence elite) women (such as the inamorata of al-Shanfarā's *mufaḍḍalīya*), are yet others tribal dependents (i.e. not members of the aristocracy) or even prostitutes sacred to a deity?[160] These women are as elusive and evasive as the very language of love-making used in the *nasīb*.[161]

The fetishism of the Iranian figurines, combined with the ubiquitous late antique appeal of Aphrodite's iconography and its inflection in the early poetry of the Arabs, is fully realized in the most consummate visual celebration of the body chain extant in pre-modern Arabo-Islam, the hunting lodge and bath house complex built probably for al-Walīd b. Yazīd (r. 125-126/743-744) at Quṣayr ʿAmra in the Jordanian al-Balqāʾ. In several of these frescoes, women are depicted wearing the body chain, in various poses and various states of dress. The woman on the south soffit of the west arch of the hall is depicted semi-laterally, her upper body turning towards the viewer, one fist resting on her right buttock,

224. I leave it to others to decide whether the Qur'anic prohibition is to be considered as restricted (directed at a specific group of women characterized by the wearing of such garments, and thus as part of the Qur'anic attack on the socio-religious dimensions of alcohol consumption: the *qaṣīda* poets, like Horace and the Romans, drank after the *Persicos mores*) from which it can be extended to all women; or whether its current hermeneutic as unrestricted is its original sense. On 'restricted' and 'unrestricted' commands and prohibitions, see JOSEPH E. LOWRY, *The Reception of al-Shāfiʿī's Concept of* Amr *and* Nahy *in the Thought of his Student al-Muzanī*, in: *Law and Education in Medieval Islam. Studies in Memory of George Makdisi*, ed. JOSEPH E. LOWRY, DEVIN J. STEWART and SHAWKAT M. TOORAWA, Oxford: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004, p. 128-149.

[160] Such women are discussed by JOSEPH CHELHOD, *Le sacrifice chez les arabes. Recherches sur l'évolution, la nature et la fonction des rites sacrificiels en Arabie occidentale*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955, p. 155-159.

[161] See MONTGOMERY, *Vagaries*, p. 52-77.

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the left arm raised slightly and bent back with index finger pointing down, adorned with anklets, bracelets, armlets, necklace, loin-cloth and body chain.[162] Very arresting are the women on the south soffit of the east arch of the hall. Their pose is full-frontal, and they gaze directly at the viewer, arms raised high above their head supporting a medallion, and bedecked with a body chain, a necklace, with three pendant leaves (?), bracelets and armlets, but wearing a shift or skirt covering the lower-half of their body.[163] Both sets of figures have been identified as dancing-girls. Of the first, Fowden notes that she is

> Like most of the Quṣayr ʿAmra women in that she has a rather slender torso and firm breasts, but heavy hips and fleshy thighs, calves and arms.[164]

In other words, she is a visual realisation of many a *ḥabīb* described in the *nasīb* of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*.

The third woman to wear a body chain is rendered on the northwest spandrel of the central aisle in the hall. She is reclining and pensive, her head resting on her left hand, her right arm outstretched, with open palm upturned. She is bedecked in a long skirt, but naked from the waist up save the now standard jewellery: one bracelet (?), armlets, necklace and *wishāḥ*:

> A hovering but wingless figure, more likely in this context to be an inept Eros than an apteral Victory hands her a crown.[165]

These life-size images remind Fowden of:

> The depictions of Victory (Nikē) holding up portrait medallions that were to be seen throughout the Roman Empire, including Syria and Jordan, and had deep roots in Greek artistic tradition.

Whilst noting that 'in attire they also recall an Aphrodite in a mosaic from a sixth-century mansion at Mādabā' he admits that:

> Their significance for the patron and artists ... is hard to guess. Probably they evoked nothing more specific than what they suggest to today's visitors, namely a courtly, opulent, and vaguely triumphal atmosphere, with a touch of irreverence in the topless and wingless Victories. If there was an allusion to some historical individual, the reclining woman who receives a crown, and whose undress ... virtually excludes her having been of free status, may have been some especially prized singing girl — such female

[162] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 65, figure 17a.
[163] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 65, figure 17b.
[164] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 65.
[165] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 74, figure 24.

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> entertainers were by definition slaves. Though they resemble her, the women in the arch soffits are elegant space fillers, not portraits.[166]

Yet the resemblances between these women and the body-girdle clad Aphrodites which Fowden himself notes copiously throughout his work are so overpowering that it would be foolhardy to deny them an identity as instantiations of the goddess (or one of her nymphs).[167] Furthermore, the resemblances between these women and one type of the (several) manifestations of the beloved of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda* are also so overpowering that it would be foolhardy to deny them a second identity as the *wishāḥ* wearing, highly charged and passionately eroticized *ḥabīb*. But are we dealing with the goddess herself (or one of her nymphs), or with concubines dressed as Aphrodite? Before we will be in a position to consider this question, we must consider the image which Fowden identifies as 'a late but powerful avatar, at the very heart of the Muslim caliphate ... of Aphrodite'[168] and ponder the worship of al-ʿUzzā in north and central pre-Islamic Arabia.

On the west wall of the hall there stands, in a position of great visual prominence, and without any verbal identification, a figure of a 'bathing beauty', her pose a combination of figures 17a and 17b, i.e. she is depicted full-frontally, her right fist rests on her right buttock and her left arm is arched at head height, with elongated index finger and pinkie pointing down.[169] Unlike them, she seems to wear a turban and a

[166] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 75.

[167] See FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 59 (depictions of Aphrodite in bathing establishments, 'and often unclothed'); p. 60 (naked Aphrodite and nymph discovered at Scythopolis, by the River Jordan, cast there in 515 AD); p. 73 (echoes of Aphrodite in his figure 25, with a reference to JENTEL, *Aphrodite*, II.1, p. 155-156 = II.2, p. 157, figure 31); p. 146 (destruction of a statue in a bath house in Fusṭāṭ, in accordance with the edict of 103-4/721, promulgated by Yazīd II (r. 101-105/720-724). In a private communication, Fowden has urged caution: 'what could it possibly have meant to have been "dressed as Aphrodite"? There's a big gap between that and having just seen the image'. My response consists of viewing the late Umayyads as much through the lens of the *Jāhilīya* as of the Classical heritage. Fowden himself has proposed an intriguing answer to his question with regard to Dionysus and Aphrodite: *Greek Myth and Arabic Poetry at Qusayr ʿAmra*, in: *Islamic Crosspollinations*, ed. A. AKASOY, P. PORMANN, and J.E. MONTGOMERY (in preparation).

[168] *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 230.

[169] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 228, figure 57. On p. 233, Fowden suggests that her left hand is raised 'in order to pull back a curtain which hangs ... behind her' and lambastes this 'as pure ineptness on the part of the artist'. BAER, *Female Images*, p. 15, describes her as drawing a curtain. The ineptness is probably one of perspective, if we see her, for all her stasis, to be mimicking the manual gesture of the image depicted as figure 17a, as FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 233, note 20, remarks. Long fingers could be highly prized in a woman: ILSE LICHTENSTÄDTER, *Das* Nasīb *der altarabischen* Qaṣīde, in: *Islamica* 5 (1932), p. 18-96 (p. 90) refers to a verse of Imru' al-Qays. The terracotta Aphrodite from

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pendant[170] rather than a body chain; like figure 17a she wears the slightest of loin-cloths, and like the other three figures she wears bracelets and armlets. If she, together with her three sisters, is not Aphrodite presiding over the luxuries of the bath,[171] her identity truly is a puzzle which Fowden has tried to solve by identifying her as the 'captive Sasanian princess', Shāh-i Āfrīd taken captive in Samarqand by Qutayba b. Muslim and rendered unto the caliph al-Walīd I (r. 86-96/705-715), subsequently becoming the mother of the caliph Yazīd b. al-Walīd (r. 126/744).[172] Whatever the truth

Sarageb (JENTEL, *Aphrodite*, II.1, p. 155-156 = II.2, p. 157, figure 31) is graced with improbably long fingers, two bracelets and one armlet. The position of her left arm is identical to that of the figure under discussion here.

[170] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 232 and 235 places particular emphasis on the 'turban the bather appears to be wearing, with a round ornament on its front', so much so that he argues that it indicates 'that the artist had some particular occasion in mind'. It is possible that the ornamented turban is an Umayyad echo of the Iranian 'central protuberance' in the depiction of feminine coiffure, 'a type of hairdo where the hair is turned into a turban on the forehead, jutting forward at the centre': see DAEMS, *Iconography*, p. 11-12 and figures 41 and 45-46. In the Middle Elamite statuaries, 'the protuberance can be represented as a circle'. This coiffure lends support to the Iranian influence which FOWDEN detects in this figure, on which see next but one note. For Aphrodite with a pendant: the mosaic of (a bare-breasted) Aphrodite in the Hippolytus hall at Mādabā in Jordan (FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 77, figure 26), wears a splendid necklace couched between her breasts, an inflection of which tradition FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 230-231, not implausibly discerns in our similarly adorned bathing beauty: he refers to JENTEL, *Aphrodite*, II.1, p. 165 = II.2, p. 169, figure 244; the Umayyad brazier from al-Faddayn northwest of Quṣayr ʿAmra, surmounted with two figures of naked women, whom I presume to be Aphrodites, clad in pendant necklaces, armlets and bracelets, with right arms outstretched and holding a bird (a dove?) in their left (FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 78, figure 27); HENRY MAGUIRE, *The Good Life*, in: *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G.W. BOWERSOCK, P. BROWN and O. GRABAR, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999, p. 238-257, figure 24, (a 'shell-shaped pendant'); BECKWITH, *Coptic Sculpture* figure 62, from circa 400 AD, is of an Aphrodite with a pendant necklace nestled in her cleavage; GRABAR, *Formation*, figure 82, a sculpture from the bath entrance at Khirbat al-Mafjar which has a prominent necklace, though not pendant between the breasts, armlet(s?) and a long skirt, in the manner of Quṣayr ʿAmra's figure 17b. Note the Iranian influence in this female's stretch marks visible above the waist of the skirt.

[171] I am not alone in reading this figure as *an* Aphrodite or as seeing her as an analogue of one of the other body-girdled figures in the complex, though I do not propose that any two of them depict the same woman; Aphrodite: see FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 232 (the painting is an allusion to 'iconographical types of Aphrodite, perhaps in particular to images that show the goddess at her bath with an attendant holding her clothes'); p. 240 (dismissal of Blazquez's suggestion that the panel represents the *maïoumas*, a ceremony in celebration of Dionysus and Aphrodite, part of the triumphal celebrations in Constantinople which may have taken place in the bath house of the Sophianai); p. 244 ('Shāh-i Āfrīd is depicted at a moment of exposure and humiliation, but also of triumph and as a new Aphrodite'); superficial similarities: p. 75 (between his figures 17b and 24); p. 235, note 21 (and the references given there: between his figures 24 and 57).

[172] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 227-247. Incidentally, the Elamite figurines and the body chain at Ctesiphon corroborate Fowden's detection of Iranian influence in the bath house, but say little about his identification of the princess.

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of these matters, and I think that Fowden's argument is here at its boldest and most speculative, be she a captive princess or a favourite dancing girl or most cherished concubine,[173] it is indubitable that she is depicted as Aphrodite and irrefragable that the goddess's (body-)girdle had bewitched the late Umayyad patron of this bath-house as it had ancient Greeks, Copts, Christians, Iranians and pre-Islamic Arabs.

Deep uncertainty governs what we know of the varieties of religious experience in the Arabian peninsula in the half millennium or so before the Qur'anic event.[174] Indeed, in the language of the Qur'ān itself, we are confronted with beings

> Who are naught but names which you have named, you and your fathers, on which Allāh has sent down no power — you simply follow conjecture and what <your> souls desire; even though guidance has come to them from their Lord![175]

Among the mysterious names mentioned in this same *sūra* of the Qur'ān (*āyas* 19 and 20), comes that of al-ʿUzzā:[176]

[173] See GRABAR, *Formation*, p. 154-155.

[174] W. ROBERTSON SMITH, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, First Series: the Fundamental Institutions*, London: Black, 1894; JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin: Reimer, 1897; NÖLDEKE, *Arabs (Ancient)*; G. RYCKMANS, *Les religions arabes préislamiques* (*Bibilothèque du Muséon*, 26), Leuven: Publications Universitaires, 1951; HENNINGER, *Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion* (originally published in 1959); WERNER CASKEL, *Die alten semitischen Gottheiten in Arabien*, in: *Le antiche divinità semitiche* (*Studi Semitici*, 1), ed. SABATINO MOSCATI, Rome: Istituto di Studi Orientali, 1958, p. 95-117; TOUFIC FAHD, *Le panthéon de l'Arabie centrale à la vieille de l'hégire*, Paris: P. Geuthner, 1968 (Chapter One: 'Conceptions religieuses de l'Arabie ancienne', p. 1-35); MARIA HÖFNER, *Zentral- und Nordarabien*, in: *Die Religionen Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer* (*Die Religionen der Menschheit*, 10.2), ed. HARTMUT GESE, MARIA HÖFNER and KURT RUDOLPH, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970, p. 354-402; IḤSĀN ʿABBĀS, *Two Hitherto Unpublished Texts on Pre-Islamic Religion*, in: *La signification du bas moyen âge dans l'histoire et la culture du monde musulman* (*Actes du 8me Congrès de l'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Aix-en-Provence - Septembre 1976*), Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1976, p. 7-16; A.G. LUNDIN, *Die arabischen Göttinnen Ruḍā und al-ʿUzzā*, in: *Hudhud. Festschrift für Maria Höfner zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. ROSWITHA STIEGNER, Graz: Karl-Franzens-Universität, 1981, p. 211-218; CHRISTIAN ROBIN, *Du paganisme au monothéisme*, in: ROBIN, *L'Arabie antique*, p. 139-155; PAVLOVITCH, *The pre-Islamic Lord*; HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 139-166; RETSÖ, *The Arabs*, p. 600-622 ('in spite of their great erudition, none of these writers has had any clear idea about what the Arabs were. They all describe the religion of the people(s) living in Arabia, not that of the Arabs', p. 616). The important articles of JOSEPH HENNINGER from over three decades are collected in *Arabia Sacra*.

[175] Q. 53.23 (*al-Najm*).

[176] WELLHAUSEN, *Reste*, p. 34-45; F.V. WINNETT, *The Daughters of Allah*, in: *The Muslim World* 30 (1940), p. 113-130; FAHD, *Le panthéon*, p. 163-182; JOSEPH HENNINGER, *Zum Problem der Venussterngottheit bei den Semiten*, in: *Anthropos* 71 (1976), p. 129-168; MICHAEL LECKER, *The Banū Sulaym. A Contribution to the Study of Early*

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Have you seen al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā; and Manāh, the third, the other?

In modern scholarship, this deity has enjoyed three (widely held) identities; the earliest attestable being that of a bilingual Aramaic-Greek inscription found on the island of Cos, and dated to the reign of Aretas IV (end of the First Century BC to first half of the First Century AD), in which al-ʿUzzā is equated with Aphrodite;[177] it has been associated with a manifestation of the planet Venus as the Morning Star;[178] and, through the venerable process of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*, as one of *al-banāt li-Allāh*, the daughters possessed by Allāh.[179]

Yet despite a plethora of references to al-ʿUzzā in many of the languages of pre-Islamic Arabia, it is unclear whether there is any continuity of worship or even identity between the deity with this name of the Northern Arabs (the Ḥawrān, Sinai, and southern Mesopotamia [i.e. the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīra]), that of the Nabataeans (Petra), that of the central Arabs (Kinda at Qaryat al-Faw, Quraysh, and others, at al-Nakhla and Mecca), or that of the Southern Arabs. The Muslim sources in Arabic aver that there was an intimate, if not exclusive, devotion which

Islam, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1989, p. 36-42; ZAYADINE, *L'iconographie d'al-ʿUzza-Aphrodite*; SUSANNE KRONE, *Die altarabische Gottheit al-Lāt* (*Heidelberger Orientalische Studien*, 23), Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992, especially p. 492-520 ('Die Gottheit al-ʿUzzā'); GERNOT ROTTER, *Der* veneris dies *im vorislamischen Mekka, eine neue Deutung des Namens "Europa" und eine Erklärung für* Kobar = *Venus*, in: *Der Islam* 70 (19993), p. 112-132; HAWTING, *Idea of Idolatry*, p. 130-149 (Chapter 6, 'The Daughters of God); JOHN F. HEALEY, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus* (*Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*, 136), Brill: Leiden, 2001, p. 114-119; M.C.A. MACDONALD and LAILA NEHMÉ, *al-ʿUzzā*, in: *EI*2, XI, p. 967-968.

[177] HEALEY, *Religion of the Nabataeans*, p.117, strikes a note of caution. It is also important to bear in mind in this connection that Herodotus, *Histories*, 3.8, does not refer to Aphrodite by name but employs instead the epithet *ouraniē*, i.e. 'heavenly <female>'. HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 252 refers to the bilingual inscriptions which equate Dushara and al-ʿUzzā with Zeus and Aphrodite.

[178] RETSÖ, *The Arabs*, p. 605-606: 'the star, *kawkabtā*, would thus be the male god, Dusares/Dionysus/Phosphoros/Eōsphoros/Lucifer'. The evidence of the text of John Damascene on the worship of the Morning Star and/as Aphrodite is unfortunately inconclusive, for the *kai* can be read both as epexegetical rather than copulative, or as copulative rather than epexegetical. See the sources given by J.B. SEGAL, *Arabs in Syriac Literature before the Rise of Islam*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), p. 89-123 (p. 112-114); and ROBERT G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 13), Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997, p. 105-107 and p. 480-489.

[179] MACDONALD and NEHMÉ, *al-ʿUzzā*, p. 968, note that 'the phrase *banāt Allāh* ... may originally have meant no more than "celestial beings"'. This article is a gem of common sense. See p. 967-968 for a survey of some of the other identities proposed for al-ʿUzzā; p. 968 for the four *āyāt* of the Qur'ān in which these 'daughters' are referred to.

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obtained between the Quraysh of Mecca and this deity (it was also worshipped by, among others, Thaqīf, Khuzāʿa, Kināna), though their 'Meccocentricity' has recently been called into doubt.[180] These same sources are also confusing on the tribal guardianship of the deity's sanctuary, it being thought the preserve of both Ghaṭafān and the Banū Sulaym, two groupings not known elsewhere in the sources for their mutual amicableness.[181] In sum, beyond noting the proliferation across the centuries of the deity's name in a variety of languages and contexts, we can but conclude, with Macdonald and Nehmé that:

> It is possible, but at present unprovable, that al-ʿUzzā was considered by her worshippers to have some of the features of Aphrodite and/or to be in some way a manifestation of the planet Venus, but there is not enough evidence to establish exactly how she was conceived in any particular region or period.[182]

And yet before we lose Aphrodite's bewitching body-girdle altogether, let us ponder a detail of one of the several versions of the destruction of the sanctuary of al-ʿUzzā by the Muslim hero, Khālid b. al-Walīd, acting under the orders of Muḥammad, on the 25th of Ramaḍān in 8 AH (16 January, 630).[183] In the account given by al-Ṭabarī on the authority of al-Wāqidī, Khālid, having destroyed the complex (?: al-Ṭabarī's narrative is not clear), returns to the Prophet who sends him back to al-Nakhla, to do the job properly, because the first attempt was not accompanied by an apparition. As Khālid destroys the deity's 'house' (*bayt*) and smashes the idol, the priest (*sādin*) invokes the deity and 'against him there sallied forth a naked Ethiopian <woman>, wailing. He killed her and took

[180] HAWTING, *Idea of Idolatry*, p. 148. For the special relationship, see IBN AL-KALBĪ, *Das Götzenbuch Kitâb al-Aṣnâm*, ed. ROSA KLINKE-ROSENBERGER, Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1941, p. 13.17, 16.14-17.8 (Arabic); HEALEY, *Religion of the Nabataeans*, p. 117 notes that there is 'some evidence in Byzantine Greek polemical texts that a relief figure of Aphrodite was located in the Kaʿba at Mecca', though their polemicism might temper, if not invalidate, their worth.

[181] LECKER, *Banū Sulaym*, p. 36; KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 501-503; ʿABBĀS, *Two Hitherto Unpublished Texts*, p. 10 posits a *ḥilf* between Sulaym and Ghaṭafān; HAWTING, *Idea of Idolatry*, p. 138-140. On the *ḥilf*, see LANDAU-TASSERON, *Alliances*.

[182] *Al-ʿUzzā*, p. 968.

[183] I have compared the versions of Ibn Isḥāq, al-Wāqidī, Ibn al-Kalbī and al-Ṭabarī: IBN ISḤĀQ, *al-Sīra al-Nabawīya*, ed. M. AL-SAQQĀ, I. AL-ABYĀRĪ and A. AL-SHALABĪ, Cairo: Muṣṭafā l-Bābī l-Ḥalabī, 1955, p. 436.8-437.7; AL-WĀQIDĪ, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. J. MARSDEN-JONES, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 873-874; IBN AL-KALBĪ, *Aṣnām*, p. 15.5-16.13; AL-ṬABARĪ, *Taʾrīkh*, I, p. 1648.1-9; *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume VIII. The Victory of Islam*, trans. MICHAEL FISHBEIN, Albany: SUNY, 1997, p. 187. There is a further account of the destruction of a deity's sanctuary at Buss recorded by AL-IṢFAHĀNĪ in his *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, XIX, Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣrīya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1972, p.15.10-17.9; see KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 501.

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such jewellery (*ḥilya*) as was on her'.[184] No other account which I have consulted mentions this jewellery, and the point in mentioning Khālid's requisitioning of them is not clear. Are they booty, or some special insignia of the deity, such as a *wishāḥ*, which would most definitely qualify as *ḥilya* and which was (in Arabian as well as other cultures) often encrusted with precious stones?[185] Or, put in narrative terms, is this a feature of the *khabar* which once was profoundly significant, but in which subsequently the tradition took next to no interest as it was deaf to its significance, its continued presence in the *khabar* a residue of an earlier account?

A recurrent feature among studies of the religious beliefs and practices of the pre-Islamic Arabs is the issue of astral cults, for which some scholars find ample evidence in Islamic as well as extra-Islamic materials, while others remain sceptical.[186] Central to every discussion of astral cults and star worship, is the equivalence of the deity al-ʿUzzā with the planet Venus, and specifically its manifestation as the morning star.[187] The question of whether al-ʿUzzā is to be equated with Aphrodite is quite a different matter from the identification of al-ʿUzzā with the planet Venus and the deity's consequent involvement in astral worship. And however we view the evidence as a whole, one thing is also clear, namely that to reject the existence of an astral cult in pre-Islamic Arabia

[184] The version of the story given in al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* is constructed as an exercise in the psychology of Khālid b. al-Walīd. See the emendation of JOHNS, *'House of the Prophet'*, p. 94, note 150: *nāfishatin shaʿru-hā*, and note. FRIEDRICH STUMMER, *Bemerkungen zum Götzenbuch des Ibn al-Kalbî*, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgendländischen Gesellschaft* 98 (1944), p. 377-394 (p. 379-380), has shown the Hellenistic-Christian origins of the exorcised demon as negroidal; see also FAHD, *Le panthéon*, p. 173-175.

[185] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 261, and note 45, discerns in the story an awareness on the part of the 'Semitic population of Syria, and to a certain extent of Arabia as well ... of the iconography of the Greek gods'.

[186] See the excellent review of the Arabic materials in SEIDENSTICKER, *Zur Frage eines Astralkultes* ('über Strenkult im vorislamischen Zentralarabien nichts Sicheres bekannt ist', p. 509), who provides evidence of pre-Islamic reverence for the new moon (*hilāl*) which he connects with the pre-Islamic pilgrimage.

[187] JOSEPH HENNINGER, *Über Sternkunde und Sternkult in Nord- und Zentralarabien*, in: *Arabia Sacra*, p. 48-117 (p. 79-96), who restricts the equation to the Northern Arabs. See also his *Zum Problem der Venussterngottheit*; RETSÖ, *The Arabs*, p. 604 and 617, note 51, notes that the evidence of Theodor ban Kônî (Eighth Century AD) associates the ʿArbāyē with the worship of Nanī, whom he equates with Ishtar, and not with al-ʿUzzā: see p. 618, note 64 for further references. HAWTING, *The Idea of Idolatry*, p. 142 is guardedly cautious on the matter of the equation. KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 499 and 506-507 sees al-ʿUzzā worship as emanating from Nabataea and borne south into the central Arabian heartlands and South Arabia by the tribes of Ghaṭafān and Sulaym, whence it spread, becoming firmly established in Mecca.

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is not the same thing as to deny the stars and other celestial bodies an important and deeply significant role in the cosmology of the *qaṣīda* poets and the warrior-elites who shared their *Weltanschauung*. The broad outlines of this cosmology and its Islamic adaptations have been brilliantly established by Nadia Jamil in two fantastic studies, to which I have briefly referred in Section One of this article:

> The universe is a gambling arena where Life is forever pitched against Death, and where men are obliged always to 'play' for the *rihān* of their life-interests. Some 'games' they win, and others they lose; but Death will always win the match.[188]

And further, should we refuse a divine association to the body chain clad damsels of the *nasīb*, this in itself does not mean that the wearing of the *wishāḥ* is without astral significance.[189]

That the wearing of the *wishāḥ* is not to be associated with the planet Venus but with the appearance of the stars of al-Thurayyā, the Pleiades, is suggested by a line of poetry in a long *lāmīya* by Imru' al-Qays:

> *Idhā mā 'l-thurayyā fī 'l-samā'i ta'arraḍat*
> *ta'arruḍa 'athnā'i 'l-wishāḥi 'l-mufaṣṣalī*
>
> When al-Thurayyā appears at an angle in the heavens,
> Just as the folds of the body chain divided <in sections, by gems> appear at an angle[190]

[188] JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 88. The paradigm for this 'covenantal duty to sacrifice for poorer dependents' (p. 62) is the *maysir* game of chance, and it resonates as a 'fusion between *maysir*-gambling and duty to a covenant centred on blood-relations' (p. 65): as such war is as much a game of chance as competing to feed the needy. See also her study, *Caliph and Quṭb. Poetry as a Source for Interpreting the Transformation of the Byzantine Cross on Steps on Umayyad Coinage*, in: *Bayt al-Maqdis. Jerusalem and Early Islam*, ed. JEREMY JOHNS, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 11-58.

[189] Thus Nabataean ear-rings which carry images of two eyes and a nose have been interpreted in terms of the iconographical image of the 'eye-idols' of al-'Uzzā: J. PATRICH, *'Al-'Uzzā' Earrings*, in: *Israel Exploration Journal* 34 (1984), p. 39-46; KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 509 and footnote 191; for a photograph, see ZAYADINE, *L'iconographie*, figure 1 (from Wadi Ramm).

[190] Ahlwardt 48.23 (= Arazi-Masalha 147.13; Ibrāhīm poem 1.24, p. 14). The translation aims to tease out the implications of the description. This image proved enormously popular among the Arabic poets of Umayyad Spain: see PAUL KUNITZSCH and MANFRED ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden in den Vergleichen der arabischen Dichtung* (*Beiträge zur lexicographie des Klassischen Arabisch*, 9), München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992, p. 35-36 and p. 36-38, numbers 1-4 and 6-12. For discussion of this verse and the efforts of the scholiasts to decipher its richness, see p. 149-152: my translation is consonant with what they term the scholiasts' 'Überinterpretation'; and for its astral extension to the 'belt' of Orion (Minṭaqat al-Jawzā') surrounding the 'breasts' of the Pleiades (al-Thurayyā), see p. 154-155. Other instances of Early Arabic poetry in which al-Thurayyā is associated with women's jewellery are nos. 28 (Yazīd b. al-

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The Pleaides herald the onset of the rainy season. Thus Bishr b. Abī Khāzim:

> *Fa-lammā ra'aw-nā bi-'l-nisāri ka-'anna-nā*
> *nashāṣu 'l-thurayyā hayyajat-hā janūbu-hā.*
>
> When they saw us in al-Nisār like
> the mighty rain clouds of al-Thurayyā whipped up by their south wind.[191]

The destructive 'rain-clouds' of this poet's raiding tribe are a savage, ironical image characteristic of how the poets understand the dynamics of this cosmology: rain as life and death; lofty nobility as protected by unassailable might (i.e. as dependent upon slaughter), and by unbridled generosity as potentially destructive of the bestower. And the rainy season is a propitious time for sexual dalliance, which can also be morbidly destructive.[192]

The cosmology of which this complex is so integral and expressive a component and in the poetic universe of which meteorological phenomena are conceptualized in terms of the camel and its slaughter in *maysir* is sophisticated.[193] Thus when al-Thurayyā function as a temporal signifier, the poetic contexts in which they do so are important, for they too express notions of plenitude, military might, nobility and eroticism, notions which are present in the majority of the twenty-six Pleiades similes from Early Arabic and Umayyad poetry collected by KUNITZSCH and ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden*:

> Eroticism: nos. 154 (Mu'aqqir al-Bāriqī), 270 (al-Farazdaq: Pleiades as gazelles as women as prey) and 345 (al-Kumayt b. Zayd): see also the *bayt* of Dhū l-Rumma on page 32;

Ṭathrīya); 42 (al-Ashhab b. Rumayla); 95 (al-Ḥuṭay'a); 350 (Suḥaym); 351 (Qays b. al-Khaṭīm). Cf. also the panegyric by Usayd b. 'Anqā' (no. 341) and the discussion on p. 22 of the Pleiades as the 'head' of a woman in relation to other stars referred to as *al-kaff al-jadhmā'* and *al-kaff al-khaḍīb* and as *al-dhirā'*.

[191] BISHR B. ABĪ KHĀZIM, *Dīwān*, ed. 'IZZA ḤASAN, Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1960, poem 3, verse 11; KUNITZSCH and ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden*, p. 23-24 and p. 32. See JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 73-74, for whom 'these two verses ... create a malignant "rain-cloud-mill"'. Al-Thurayyā can also herald a period of winter hardship: KUNITZSCH and ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden*, p. 31. See AL-AZRAQĪ, *Kitāb Akhbār Makka*, ed. F. WÜSTENFELD, I, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1859, p. 79.21-22 (*wa-qāla la-hum 'Amr inna rabba-kum yataṣayyaf bi-l-Lāt li-bard al-Ṭā'if wa-yushattiw bi-l-'Uzzā li-ḥarr al-Tihāma*).

[192] See my review of KUNITZSCH and ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden*, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114 (1994), p. 687.

[193] See KUNITZSCH and ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden*, nos. 273 (Muhalhil b. Rabī'a) and 408 (in which the booty is to be understood as camels: Khufāf b. Nudba). In general, they take what we might call a 'univocal' approach to this complex of imagery, especially on p. 147-154: thus 'das Tertium comparationis können die Lichtpunkte, das Leuchten oder der Glanz sein' (p. 148). In so doing, they do not allow room for the wider semantic and conceptual universe of which the similes are part.

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Plenitude: nos. 214 (?Ḥassān b. Thābit), 242 (Abū Qays b. al-Aslat), 295 (Dhū l-Rumma);
Lofty nobility and unassailable might: nos. 200 (ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zabīr), 302 (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. al-Ḥassān), 303 (Dhū l-Rumma), 304 (Kharqāʾ al-ʿĀmirīya), 305 (Anonymous), 412 (al-Ṭirimmāḥ). To these I would add the descriptions of troops of riders in nos. 316 (Khidāsh b. Zuhayr) and 327 (al-Shamardal) — cf. also the association of al-Thurayyā with the 'cistern of death' (*ḥawḍ al-mawt*) in a verse by Abū Ṣakhr and the tribal hierarchy of al-Ḥārith b. Ḥilliza, quoted on p. 33 and 34.[194]

Of the remainder, the sieve of no. 156 (Bishr b. ʿAmr b. Marthad) is obscure; the Pleiades are associated with the assaults of Time (*ghawāshin*) by Jarīr (no. 353), evoking Qur'ān 88:17 (*al-Ghāshiya*), in which the *ibil* were glossed by some *mufassirūn* as *saḥāb*, clouds, to the scorn of al-Naẓẓām;[195] and in a famous simile (no. 283) Dhū l-Rumma compares the Pleiades with a 'son of water' (*ʾibn māʾ*) soaring high in the sky above, understood as a water fowl of some sort, which makes me think of *al-gharānīq al-ʿulā*, the highest *gharānīq* (cranes, swans or herons?), of the Satanic Verses in the account of the revelation of Qur'ān 53 (*al-Najm*), in the first verse of which the incipient oath *wa-l-najm* is understood by some exegetes to mean al-Thurayyā,[196] and in verses 19-20 of which the three divinities of Allāt, al-ʿUzzā and Manāh are invoked.[197] A verse of Labīd's confirms the religiosity of the cosmology:

[194] See JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 75-77 and 86-87; *Caliph and Quṭb*, p. 22 (on the *ḥawḍ*).

[195] AL-JĀḤIẒ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿABD AL-SALĀM HĀRŪN, I, Cairo: Muṣṭafā 'l-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938, p. 343.13-14; JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 71, note 94.

[196] KUNITZSCH and ULLMANN, *Die Plejaden*, p. 27-29. ILSE LICHTENSTÄDTER, *A Note on the* Gharānīq *and Related Qur'ānic Problems*, in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), p. 54-61, discusses the association of the Daughters of Allāh, the *gharānīq* and the occasional gloss as 'delicate youth', 'noble people' and tentatively proposes 'a solution on the lines of the saga of water nymphs' (be it in the form of birds or nymphs) who assume human form upon quitting their watery habitat (p. 60-61). Her reference to the paradisiacal geese (*iwazz al-janna*) which, in Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, Ibn al-Qarīḥ observes metamorphosing into firm-breasted maidens (*jawārī kawāʿib*) and whose poetic and musical prowess the Shaykh puts to the test, suggests the longevity of this series of associations: divine being, water-fowl and beautiful woman (note also the sly reference to *ṣanam min aḥjār*: p. 205.3): AL-MAʿARRĪ, *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, ed. ʿĀʾISHA ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN BINT AL-SHĀṬIʾ, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1950, p. 204.7-207.2; GREGOR SCHOELER, *Die Vision, die auf einer Hypothese gründet: Zur Deutung von Abū 'l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's* Risālat al-Ġufrān, in: *Problems in Arabic Literature* ed. M. MAROTH, Piliscsaba: The Avicenna Institute of Middle East Studies, 2004, p. 27-41.

[197] See URI RUBIN, *The Eye of the Beholder*, Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995, p. 156-166 (p. 159). HAWTING, *Idea of Idolatry*, p. 147 notes the ritual formula which 'began, according to the report in the *Aṣnām*, with a slight variant upon K. 53:19-20 and then finished with the "high-flying cranes". The tag ... may have an existence independent of the "satanic verses" story, and perhaps of Ibn al-Kalbī's report too'.

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Wa-l-nujūmu 'l-latī tatābaʿu bi-l-lay
li wa-fī-hā dhāta l-yamīni 'zwirārū
Dā'ibun mawru-hā wa-yaṣrifu-hā l-ghaw
ru ka-mā yaṣrifu l-hijāna l-duwwarū

Which Jamil renders as:

> And the stars that succeed one another by night, inclining westward [as they sink], follow a steady beaten track, directed by the law of their setting, as the idol of circumambulation dictates the movement of [worshipping] white-skinned women.[198]

The earthly 'mill' (*raḥā*), 'the corporate body of the covenant and its machine of war' (p. 68), which is also the celestial 'mill', 'has a centre equated with a sacred stone of ritual circumambulation' (p. 70). Thus it rotates around the *quṭb* — the chieftain of the tribe, the pole of the heavens and the betyl.

So, then, is the body chain wearing siren of the *qaṣīda* poets associated with al-ʿUzzā and is al-ʿUzzā, consequentially, associated with al-Thurayyā? One place in which to look for an answer is al-Ḥīra of the Lakhmid dynasty of Nasr. I have mentioned previously in Section One my theory that al-Ḥīra is one of the principal settlements in the environs of which the ideologies of Bedouinising *qaṣīda* poetry were forged.[199] The rulers of this cantonment seem to have oscillated between (Nestorian?) Christianity and al-ʿUzzā worship, as Arabic and non-Arabic sources attest, with al-Mundhir III (r. 503-554), al-Mundhir IV (r. ca. 574-580) and al-Nuʿmān III (r. 580-602) especially conspicuous for their devotion to al-ʿUzzā.[200] In one *khabar*, al-Nuʿmān refers a case of litiga-

[198] JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 70; see also *Caliph and Quṭb*, p. 19 (a verse by ʿĀmir b. al-Ṭufayl) and p. 30.

[199] Clearly, the Hudhalī poets do not fit too comfortably in his scheme, and the deity seems to have exerted some appeal for several of their poets. The nature of Sasanian influence in Mecca and Kister's account of Mecca's contacts with al-Ḥīra do not invalidate the proposition, while the Hudhalī poets reveal that the *wishāḥ* should be kept in the Ḥijāz proper and not merely a northern buffer-zone.

[200] MACDONALD and NEHMÉ, *al-ʿUzzā*, p. 968, provide the basic references; NÖLDEKE, *The Arabs (Ancient)*, p. 660 refers to the testimonies of Isaac of Antioch (worship of *al-Kawkabtā*) and Procopius, while KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 512-513 notes the testimony of Evagrius that al-Nuʿmān III of al-Ḥīra had in his possession a gold image of Venus, on which see HENRI CHARLES, *Le christianisme des Arabes nomades sur le Limes et dans le désert syro-mésopotamien aux alentours de l'hégire*, Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1936, p. 60; RETSÖ, *The Arabs*, p. 602 and 617, notes 31 and 32; HOYLAND, *Arabia and the Arabs*, p. 252-253, note 7. TRIMINGHAM, *Christianity*, p. 157, 193-194, 198 and 254-255, discusses these sources. The text of a famous letter which al-Mundhir b. Mā' al-Samā' sent to Kisrā, describing the captive girl taken from the Jafnid al-Ḥārith b. Jabala (r. ca. 529-569) who accompanied it, specifically mentions her *wishāḥ*: see AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ta'rīkh*, I, p. 1025.16-1026.17 (*gharthā l-wishāḥ*, p. 1026.5); *History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume V*, trans. C.E.

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tion to al-ʿUzzā for settlement while in another, al-Mundhir III is said to declare his devotion to Allāt and al-ʿUzzā, a combination of divinities which is not unattested in the verses of the *qaṣīda* poets who, together with the warrior elite to which they belonged and for whom they declaimed their verse, revelled in the paradoxes and oxymorons of fertility, sensuality, war and destruction which a merging of these identities allowed them to express.[201]

Another place to look is the dome of the caldarium of Quṣayr ʿAmra, the ceiling of which is decorated with a fantastic fresco of the Zodiac after a model in a Greek astronomical manuscript; for all its Hellenistic reinterpretation, the *jāhilī* complex of the planetary association of inamorata, Aphrodite and astral lore was not lost on those who masterminded the iconography of the lodge, if they are read as perpetuators of the *Jāhilīya*.[202]

And yet another place to look is in the Qur'ān, which, whilst not furnishing an answer, may offer us a brilliant but grimly ironic clue. Verses 4 and 5 of *Sūrat al-Masad* (Qur'ān 111) run:

BOSWORTH, p. 353-354; FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 238. That the features of this remarkable verbal tour-de-force are entirely consonant with the Early Arabic *nasīb* is bought out by LICHTENSTÄDTER, *Nasīb*, p. 89-91. KRONE, *al-Lāt*, p. 504-505 briefly surveys the tribal affiliations of individuals with theophorics which included al-ʿUzzā. Her results show 16 occurrences for Quraysh but 14 for Bakr b. Wā'il (10) and Taghlib (4) who occupied North-Eastern Arabia and Mesopotamia.

[201] ABŪ TAMMAM, *Hamasae Carmina*, ed. G. FREYTAG, II, Bonn: Lechner 1847-1851, p. 116.15-16 (al-Nuʿmān); *Aghānī*, II, p. 104.6-9 (al-Mundhir b. Mā' al-Samā' swears an oath by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā). WINNETT, *The Daughters of Allah*, p. 128 discerns in al-Mundhir's sacrifice of 400 nuns to al-ʿUzzā 'the function of a war-goddess'. The richest discussion is KRONE, *al-Lāt*, passim, and p. 512 (for the equation of al-ʿUzzā with Atargatis), p. 512-513 (al-ʿUzzā as 'Kriegs- und Schutzgottheit' and her shared functions with al-Lāt) and p. 520 where she notes that central Arabia is the only region in which al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā are fused, 'a creation of a later period', discerning therein monotheistic influence: see WELLHAUSEN, *Reste*, p. 31; HAWTING, *Idea of Idolatry*, p. 138 sees this as evidence of confusion rather than as a sign of creativity. For the *qaṣīda* masters of the *ʿarabīya* and the Nasrids of al-Ḥīra, the biparous aspect of life and death epitomized by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā, captured perfectly the complex nature of their cosmology and *Weltanschauung*. See also LUNDIN, *Die arabischen Göttinnen*, p. 216, who makes a similar observation of the goddess ʿAthtarta/Ishtar. KRONE's discussion (*al-Lāt*, p. 515) of the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad who offers to protect Zayd al-Khayl al-Ṭā'ī from al-ʿUzzā and the 'black horse' (which she understands as having played a role in the cult of al-ʿUzzā) affords an opportunity to reconsider the symbolic dimensions of the horse in the poetry of Imruʾ al-Qays and ʿAlqama b. ʿAbada. According to JAMIL, *Playing for Time*, p. 83-88; *Caliph and Quṭb*, p. 24, horses, storms/water and destructive raids are associated in a fecund matrix of imagery.

[202] FOWDEN, *Quṣayr ʿAmra*, p. 42-44, figure 10. In a private communication, Fowden has expressed his reservations concerning such a connection.

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wa-'mra'atu-hū ḥammālatu/a 'l-ḥaṭab: fī jīdi-hā ḥablun min masad
And his woman, the porter of kindling wood: on her neck a rope of fibres.[203]

The Abū Lahab of this *sūra* was, evidently at a very early stage, identified with Muḥammad's paternal uncle ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. The theophoric naturally led some *mufassirūn* and *akhbārīyūn* to connect this *sūra* with *sūra* 53, in which al-ʿUzzā is mentioned. Thus Ibn al-Kalbī's version of Abd al-ʿUzzā's declaration to the *sādin* of al-ʿUzzā's sanctuary at al-Nakhla of his devotion to the deity comes after the account of the Satanic Verses; or Abū Lahab's son is said to have died after he had repudiated the revelation of *Sūrat al-Najm*. Clearly, then, al-ʿUzzā loomed large in the minds of a number of the readers of this *sūra* in the formative first two centuries after the *Hijra*.[204] Just how prominently she loomed becomes obvious in some of the glosses of the phrase *ḥabl min masad*. Qatāda (d. 117/735), and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), are said to have interpreted this as referring to a *qilāda min wadʿ* (or, *kharz*), 'a necklace made of cowries' (or, shells), while for Saʿid b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), *masad* stands for *jawhar*, precious stones.[205] Now, what these examples of exegesis tell us is not necessarily that such ornamentation is the butt of the Qur'ān's parody (this is an especially obscure and polyvalent sample of the Revelation) but that it was how these Umayyads visualized the accessories of a woman in the service of al-ʿUzzā when they responded to the influence of the theophoric in their exegesis of these verses.

Aphrodite's body-girdle is the goddess of love's most potently enthralling accessory and she may have bewitched me into hearing echoes of her celebration, if not indeed worship, among (some) *qaṣīda* poets of pre-Islamic Arabia. That the Ḥijāz seems not as empty now as it did before may also be part of her spell.

What remains, however, is that Arabic *qaṣīda* poetry is a necessary though by no means sufficient condition for the miracle of an Arabic Qur'ān.

[203] See generally URI RUBIN, *Abū Lahab and Sūra CXI*, in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 42 (1979), p. 13-28. Footnote 73 on p. 25 explains the reasons for the divergent vocalizations of the epithet *ḥammāla*; with *jīd* compare, for example, the verse from Ṭarafa's *Muʿallaqa* quoted in note 159 above, p. 83-84.

[204] RUBIN, *Abū Lahab*, p. 14 and 24 respectively.

[205] RUBIN, *Abū Lahab*, p. 27-28, for discussion and references.

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